異世界の
聖機師物語

Tenchi Muyo War on Geminar

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Prologue

As the sun began to sink, the Holy Land was dyed in vermilion. At that twilight hour, a tall old man appeared unexpectedly in the Holy Land. Though he was called an old man, his back was stretched straight, and there was no hesitation in his stride.

The gatekeeper took a posture of the utmost respect to welcome the old man. However, his expression seemed somewhat troubled.

"Please do not cause too much trouble..."

The gatekeeper's murmur did not reach the old man. As if he knew the place by heart, the tall old man casually passed through the gate marked "No Entry to Unauthorized Personnel."

The shadow of the old man, stretched long by the setting sun, reached the passage leading to the underground facilities of the Holy Land.

The tall old man descended deep into the underground facility, to an area where even the Holy Land staff rarely set foot.

Two old men stood in his way. One was a chubby old man with a smirk on his face. The other was a cheerful-looking old man whose magnificent white hair and white beard caught the eye.

"Oh, it has been a long time, you two. Is it... three years since we last met in person?"

The tall old man shook hands with the two, and they praised each other’s robust health.

"But as expected, one cannot win against the waves of age. My whole body has started to creak."

The white-haired old man rubbed his hand and leg joints and let out a small sigh.

"Hehehe, how pathetic. I won't lose to the young ones yet. I feel like I could even return to active duty right now."

When the chubby old man with the husky voice chimed in from the side, he placed his hands on his hips and puffed out his chest. The white-haired old man returned a bitter smile while scratching his head.

"You are as obsessed with your 'virility' as ever. Wasn't your retirement a bit too early?"

"Well, it's problematic if the blood becomes too thick."

The chubby old man said this nonchalantly. Rather than taking offense at the white-haired old man's teasing, he laughed happily. The three were old friends who could trade insults. Even meeting after several years, the strong bond between those who shared the same circumstances could not be severed.

"So, which one is the one you found?" the tall, shadowy old man asked the two who had arrived first.

In a corner of the dim underground facility, a vivid three-dimensional image emerged. Captured on the 3D projection monitor was the figure of a single boy.

The tall old man groaned. He lost himself in thought for a moment, overlapping the boy with his own past circumstances.

"Is there no mistake?"

"The Sitreiyu girl seems to be hiding him, but if you observe his daily life, it is obvious at a glance. My eyes cannot be deceived. Hehehe."

The chubby old man laughed boastfully.

"Even checking against my information, there is likely no mistake. Hahaha."

Then the white-haired old man laughed as if following suit.

"Intuition and information networks... I am relieved to see you haven't gone senile yet."

The tall old man stared at the boy again.

"His abilities are perfect. Even among successive generations of people from another world—no, he is outstanding to the point of being called abnormal."

"As far as the report issued by Wahanly Unly goes, there is no mistake that he is the pilot of the white Sacred Mechanoid. Moreover, he supposedly toyed with the two units of Chiaia Flan and Wahanly."

"Ho..."

That meant he had the potential to be an existence that could completely rewrite the genealogical chart of Sacred Mech Masters.

"But the problem is that now is not a period when summoning is possible."

"Ehehehehe. Well, can't that be something to look forward to in the future? Regardless of the circumstances of how he came to this world, this is..."

"A good way to kill boredom... perhaps?"

"That is exactly it."

The three exchanged wicked smiles.

"May fortune be with this boy..."

"Ho-ho-ho, you say that with such a straight face. Then, will you stop it?"

"Everything is a life lesson."

"You certainly have a way with words. You old fossil."

The raspy laughter of the three old men echoed through the dim underground facility.

In the central control room of the Holy Land underground facility, two men on duty were checking the numerical values on various displays.

"...Hm? Senior, the margin of error for the output value of Reactor No. 3 is... increasing!"

The man who seemed to be the junior alerted the man sitting next to him. A discrepancy had appeared between the output value of the large-scale barrier reactor and the value being used in the facility.

"What?"

The man stared at the monitor in a hurry, but no problematic error appeared, and all instruments showed normal operation.

"If there's no problem with the barrier reactor, then the facility in that deep underground space must be consuming it."

"You mean... *that* one?"

In the Holy Land, there existed many facilities from long before the Church began using them, as well as ruins older than the Great Cataclysm. Surprisingly, among the ten large Ahou barrier reactors operating in the Holy Land, Reactor No. 3 dated from before the era of the Great Cataclysm. Furthermore, the output lines from it were particularly complex and intertwined; it had reached a mysterious state where no one could grasp the full picture of where it was supplying energy.

"What should we do? Shall we shut it down once for inspection?"

"Leave it alone. It happens often."

"But it would be bad if some strange facility comes back to life..."

The junior looked at his senior anxiously.

"There isn't a problem with the reactor itself, and there is surplus energy. We won't be troubled by a little leakage. Besides, as for an investigation, who would even go?"

"...That is true."

Every year at this time, a large number of technicians were pulled away, resulting in a labor shortage. If they did investigations for every little thing, it would interfere with other duties.

"But what exactly is around that area?"

"I don't know. Rumor has it that ruins from before the Great Cataclysm are still alive today, but..."

"From before the Great Cataclysm... is it?"

Even being told that, it did not quite register for the man who seemed to be the junior. It was a story so old it could already be called a myth.

"There are all sorts of other strange rumors about the Holy Land underground, you know. They say if you step foot in the wrong place, you'll never come out again. Come to think of it..."

The senior man suddenly lowered his voice.

"I heard that when those output errors happen in Reactor No. 3... strange things occur."

"Hey, cut it out, please."

In the dim central control room, where no one else was present besides the two on duty, the junior man turned pale and shook his head as his senior whispered in a low tone.

"I'm not good with that kind of stuff."

"Wahaha! It's a joke. Anyway, as long as the output doesn't drop any further than this, you can just ignore it."

At the senior's loud laughter, the junior man let out a small sigh of relief.

However, though the two on duty did not notice, at the end of the output line extending from Reactor No. 3, three old men were happily performing strange modifications.

Episode 1

Kenshi Masaki held his breath and aimed at a beast about a dozen meters away. He aimed for the exact moment the prey's vigilance wavered.

[*...Now!*]

The arrow released from his self-made bow didn't lose its momentum and pierced the beast straight between the eyes. Without even a death cry, the prey collapsed.

"Alright."

Satisfied with the prey he had taken down, Kenshi finished his morning hunt.

His life as a laborer at the Holy Land Academy was going quite smoothly. Kenshi's day began with hunting and gathering in the forest that spread out behind the academy. It was a daily morning routine that served as his training.

He was still small in stature as he was in the middle of his growth, but his well-proportioned physique was superbly trained, and there was practically no opening in his movements.

He had wondered what would happen when he was thrown into a different world, but after many twists and turns, he had become the attendant of Princess Lashara Earth XXVIII of the Shurifon Empire and was now working as a laborer at the Holy Land Academy's upperclassmen dormitory.

He didn't know how to return to his original world, but he had begun to settle into this world in his own way. There was a forest where he could be self-sufficient, so there was no worry of starving.

"Kenshi, hunting in the forest again?"

"Good morning, Princess Lashara."

When he returned from the forest to the independent dormitory, a girl shorter than Kenshi looked up at him and spoke. Her golden hair was still messy from sleep, sticking up here and there.

"If you wander around in that state, Maya-san, the head maid, will scold you again."

"This independent dormitory building is like my own room. What I wear in my own room is my own business!"

Lashara pouted with a sullen face. Despite her young age of twelve, she had just recently ascended to the throne as the Empress of the Shurifon Empire. Though she possessed the intellect and caliber of a leader, she occasionally showed a glimpse of the stubbornness appropriate for her age.

Good grief, Maya-san sure has a hard time...

"Did you say something?"

"Ah, Chiaia! Good morning!"

As if to cover his tracks, Kenshi called out to Chiaia Flan, the Royal Guard Captain protecting Lashara, who appeared from the side.

"Good morning, Kenshi."

Red hair from her short cut was sticking to her forehead with sweat. It seemed she made swinging her sword a daily morning routine; her flushed cheeks exuded a healthy charm. She was slightly taller than Kenshi. She was an upperclassman at the Holy Land Academy and also an excellent Sacred Mech Master.

"Pr—Princess Lashara, what a state to be in!"

Chiaia, noticing Lashara hiding in the shadow of the building, rushed over with a pale face.

"Back to your room, quickly!"

"I went through the trouble of waking up early. I want to feel the morning air for a little longer."

At Lashara's stubborn tone, Chiaia let out a sigh and draped a bath towel she had prepared for wiping sweat over Lashara's shoulders.

"My apologies. Even so, Kenshi is surprisingly adaptable."

Lashara glanced at the shed for food storage built in a corner of the independent dormitory grounds. The independent dormitory was about the size of a small castle.

Both Chiaia and Kenshi lived there as Lashara's attendants. The shed Kenshi stayed in was one he had built himself just the other day, procuring wood from the forest behind the academy. He dried the fish he caught and smoked the animals he hunted.

"I could live here for the rest of my life like this."

At Kenshi's response, Lashara nodded as if satisfied and returned inside to change.

"Hey..."

Chiaia looked at Kenshi as if glaring at him, checking the surroundings. Suddenly, she began to speak in a low voice.

"Kenshi, you're a high level criminal who tried to take Princess Lashara's life."

"Ugh..."

"At least repay the favor before you go home. You haven't forgotten that you were spared from execution, right? Understood?"

Chiaia said this spitefully while wearing a faint smile.

"That's why you mustn't do anything disrespectful. Okay?"

"Yeah, I know."

Nodding at Kenshi's words, Chiaia also went inside to take a shower.

"Hnnn—ngh!"

Released from Lashara and Chiaia, Kenshi took a big stretch. After breakfast, labor at the students' dormitory awaited him. It looked like today was going to be another fine day.

"By the way, I hear there is a student council welcome party after school today."

"Eh! T-That's... I'm not really looking forward to that..."

"I will have you attend as my attendant, so be prepared."

"Eh? Me too?"

"Didn't I tell you to actively get people to remember your face? Even though it’s the student council, it should be full of familiar faces. There is no harm in deepening friendships, is there?"

"..."

"Except for Maria. You understand that much, don't you?"

Maria was the princess of the Havoniwa Kingdom and Lashara's cousin. She was the same age as Lashara, and her strong-willed personality was similar; their opinions clashed at every opportunity.

How many days had passed since Kenshi was summoned here to the planet Geminar? It seemed he had completely settled into this world, but he was frequently surprised by customs that were difficult to understand. Above all, the existence of the Sacred Mechanoids as combat weapons and the Sacred Mech Masters who piloted them was significant. A Sacred Mechanoid was a giant humanoid weapon about a dozen meters tall, capable of high mobility by operating a high-output Ahou barrier reactor using Ena as an energy source.

Ena was something like an invisible gas, and a sea of Ena formed a layer in the atmosphere up to an altitude of about five hundred meters. Several countries, large and small, prospered in the sea of Ena centered around the Church. The Shurifon Empire was one of them.

The Sacred Mechanoids, which utilized Ahou arts through that Ena, were absolute weapons with tremendous power and served as the cornerstone of defense and deterrence for each nation. Therefore, to maintain the military balance, the number of Sacred Mechanoids in each country was restricted and managed entirely by the Church.

However, a Sacred Mech Master who piloted a Sacred Mechanoid required endurance against the vibration waves emitted by the Ahou barrier reactor. Except for a very few exceptions, this endurance was genetic and not something that could be managed through training. If numbers couldn't be increased and training didn't help, the only way to improve military strength was to raise the quality of the Sacred Mechanoid masters. In other words, Sacred Mech Masters with higher endurance values were needed. And since endurance values were determined genetically, it was a natural progression that the marriages of Sacred Mech Masters were managed by the state.

The problem was that because there was a significant imbalance in the male-to-female ratio, male Sacred Mech Masters were extremely precious. For that reason, in this world, various privileges were granted to male Sacred Mech Masters. In exchange, they had no freedom of marriage. Their reproductive acts were managed until they retired.

Furthermore, those summoned as people from another world invariably showed high endurance values against Ahou vibration waves and were also excellent Sacred Mech Masters. For that reason, if it became known to those around him that Kenshi was an off-worlder, things would surely become troublesome, and Lashara had strictly warned him never to speak of it.

++ Recollection 1

After being sent to another world and waking up at the ruins of summoning, Kenshi was picked up by masked men. There, without knowing left from right, he was given training in piloting a Sacred Mechanoid in an underground facility where he couldn't even see the scenery. He had followed the masked man because he had no choice but to believe the promise that if he cooperated in the assassination of Princess Lashara of the Shurifon Empire, he would be returned to his original world.

If Lashara had not accepted Kenshi that night, what would have happened by now?

In the middle of the night, illuminated by a full moon, the Shurifon Empire's transport ship, the *Swan*, was proceeding along the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land while floating in the air via an Ahou barrier reactor.

"Haah, haah, haah..."

Kenshi waited single-mindedly while enduring the unpleasant vibration waves of the Ahou barrier reactor.

“They’ve come. Go.”

The voice of the masked man was heard from the communicator. Once Kenshi confirmed the *Swan* carrying Princess Lashara and the others above him, he activated the Sacred Mechanoid within the cockpit. The Ahou power reactor began to rotate with a high-pitched sound. Along with it, the Sacred Mechanoid burst through its egg-shaped cocoon and achieved a transformation into a dragon-like second form.

The masked man's order was against his will, but he still had no choice but to obey.

"I have to do it... I have to... otherwise I can't go home!"

Kenshi shouted as he operated the levers, and the Sacred Mechanoid took off toward the *Swan*. He slipped through the surveillance network and landed on the *Swan*. It was a location close to Princess Lashara's bedchamber.

Only one red Sacred Mechanoid came out to meet him.

“Do you know that this ship belongs to Her Majesty Lashara Earth of the Shurifon Empire?”

That call belonged to a woman. According to the information he had been given beforehand, it was certainly the Sacred Mechanoid piloted by Princess Lashara's Royal Guard Captain. Her name was surely Chiaia, he recalled.

“If you won't answer, I'll just have to find out by force!”

At that moment, in the sky on the opposite side of the sleeping quarters, the sound of an explosion echoed.

"Y-you useless wretch! Because you failed to hold them back, we have failed! Regrettably, I am retreating... but you will take responsibility and take the life of Lashara. If you do, I will return your body to where it belongs, just as promised."

With only those words, the communication cut off. It seemed the masked man had retreated.

"What?! [.....Take her life? Me?]"

Kenshi brushed aside his opponent's sword with brute force. Partly due to his nausea, a chill ran down his spine. To return to his original world, he had to get his hands dirty. But was he truly capable of such a thing?

[.....]

"I'm going back. I’m definitely... going back!"

The red Seikijin lost its balance, but Kenshi did not follow up with an attack. No matter how much he told himself it was to return to his original world, he hesitated to hurt anyone. The opponent seemed to realize Kenshi was a diversion and tried to head

toward the quarters. But, of course, he couldn't let them pass. Kenshi stood in the way of the opponent's Seikijin.

"Was there another one...?"

He finally understood why the masked man had failed the assassination, despite the fact that he had been stalling Chiaia, the Captain of the Guard. In this situation, where he was close to his operational limit, facing two units was a heavy burden even for a skilled Kenshi.

Kenshi removed the limiter on the Ahou Barrier Reactor. A high-pitched, grating rotation sound roared. He then lunged at the red Seikijin with incredible speed.

The opponent surely hadn't expected to be dodged. They seemed surprised, as no follow-up attack came.

"Huff, huff, huff....."

Kenshi's duty was to stall the Captain of the Guard here. In the meantime, the masked man was supposed to kill Empress Lashara. The vibration waves emitted from the Ahou Barrier Reactor were already causing unbearable pain. He felt like he might vomit at any moment, but he had no choice but to keep enduring.

Kenshi lightly parried the swords swung nimbly by the red Seikijin, continuing to dodge with minimal movement. However, the opponent certainly wasn't holding back. The moment a small distance opened between him and the red Seikijin, the opponent fired a succession of Ahou Bullets from their left arm.

Kenshi dodged instinctively, but one of them emitted a blinding flash. It veiled his field of vision.

"Urgh!!"

He was already near his operational limit. A discomfort so intense he felt he might lose consciousness was eroding his mind and body.

"Is it not over yet?"

Immediately after, sensing an approaching murderous intent, Kenshi unconsciously blocked with his sword. He flew backward to offset the momentum, then stopped to distance himself.

"Move!"

He heard the shouting voice of the woman who was his opponent.

Kenshi and the red Seikijin began clashing swords again. He wondered if the masked man was progressing well. However, in vain of Kenshi's hopes, he saw two Seikijin units escaping into the sky. Then, the masked man's voice over the comms shattered his expectations.

Naturally, his hands began to tremble. His hesitation appeared in his sword movements, and his strength control became subtly weak. But he had to make up his mind right now.

As if anticipating his internal conflict, the red Seikijin attacked. Even though they took the initiative, Kenshi was not one to fall behind. Using his unit's tail, he tripped the opponent's Seikijin.

He didn't want to kill needlessly. Without having made up his mind, he headed toward the sleeping quarters where Empress Lashara was. But there, another Seikijin stood in his way.

It was different this time. With just a single blow delivered by Kenshi, the unit's right shoulder was destroyed, and it stopped moving on the spot. A newly appeared Seikijin fired a gunpowder-type firearm, but Kenshi identified the direction of the muzzle and dodged every shot. He closed the distance at once, aiming to deliver a finishing blow.

But that was as far as it went.

"Waaaaah!"

Kenshi's white Seikijin had displayed incredible high-mobility performance, but the price was high, and the unit began to self-destruct. Armor peeled off in pieces, and the limbs began to turn black from the extremities.

"Stop! Stop it!"

He tried to control the Ahou Barrier Reactor that had frantically begun to over-rotate, but it was already beyond his control.

"Ugh, uwaaaaaah!"

His head throbbed as if it were splitting. The collapse of the Seikijin didn't stop, and fortunately, one of the two Ahou Barrier Reactors fell off. Thanks to that, the vibration waves weakened.

Rousing his consciousness, he headed toward the quarters. A red Seikijin came slashing at him with one hand.

"Ugh... La, Lashara....."

Without losing consciousness, Kenshi parried the red Seikijin's relentless attack. The white Seikijin controlled by Kenshi caught the blow with its double-edged knight sword. For a moment, sparks flashed. Kenshi's white Seikijin snapped the opponent's sword and rendered them unable to act in an instant. He was no longer in a state where he could hold back. He used the last of his strength to reach the quarters just as he reached his operational limit.

Kenshi climbed down from the white Seikijin and walked with staggering steps toward the balcony where Lashara was.

Lashara was waiting calmly for Kenshi, bathed in the moonlight. There was a certain kind of nobility and beauty there.

"That was quite the fight, Sir Holy Mechanoid Master....."

The voice he heard for the first time felt young, yet possessed a firm power of will and intelligence. However, to return to his original world, he had to kill this girl.

"Are you... a man?"

Lashara showed no sign of fear whatsoever. He didn't know if she was just surprised, but despite being about to be attacked, she didn't seem frightened. Naturally, the tip of his dagger began to tremble. Kenshi closed his eyes and asked himself once more if he could kill this girl.

Kenshi dropped the dagger to the ground.

"I’m taking you... with me."

Since he couldn't get his hands dirty himself, he had no choice but to take her to the masked man.

"Ho, are you saying you wish to elope with me? That is an attractive proposal, but looking at you, you seem to have a terrible case of Ahou sickness. Can you really take me away in such a state?"

The gazes of Kenshi and Lashara locked. At that moment, he heard the sound of a door opening behind him. He easily dodged a sword swung at him from behind, and without looking back, he grabbed the opponent's arm and threw them forward. It was Chiaia, who served as Lashara's Captain of the Guard. Her red hair shone in the moonlight.

Kenshi readied the sword he had snatched away. But because of the violent movement just now, his body reached its limit. A sudden sensation of intense nausea and a splitting headache signaled the end.

"Gah!"

Kenshi let out a scream of agony despite himself. The Captain of the Guard, Chiaia, was not one to miss that split-second opening. She closed the distance instantly and buried her knee into his solar plexus. Kenshi collapsed backward, hitting the back of his head hard. There, he lost consciousness.

Afterward, Kenshi was captured by Lashara and her group and was eventually confined. However, one could say he was lucky just for not being killed on the spot.

While he was tidying up hunting tools and such, a voice called out from behind.

"Whoa, it's increased quite a bit in the short time I haven't seen you!"

"Nyhahahaha—"

A girl with twin-tails dressed in a uniform looked at the fish being sun-dried outside the shack and laughed with a boisterously cheerful voice.

"Do you want to try some, Wahanlyn? It's delicious."

Kenshi nibbled on a small fish and offered a piece to Wahanlyn. Wahanlyn twitched her nose while sniffing the scent of the fillet. She immediately grimaced and shook her head.

"Ugh, e-eh, I'll pass."

Since it emitted the unique smell of freshwater fish, it might be tough for those who aren't fond of it.

Wahanlyn, also known as Wahanlynly Shume, was one of Lashara’s attendants, just like Chiaia and Kenshi. She was a Holy Mechanoid Technician belonging to the "Barrier Workshop", a group of engineers from the Holy Land. She worked on the development and maintenance of Seikijin and Ahou machinery. Furthermore, she was conducting research on power engines using steam, separate from the Ahou Barrier Reactors.

She was also an excellent Holy Mechanoid Master and a senior at the Holy Land Academy, the same as Chiaia. It seemed the other Seikijin unit that appeared midway through Kenshi's attempt to kidnap Lashara was piloted by this Wahanlyn. It was her who had repelled the masked man that night using firearms that utilized gunpowder.

"But if there's this much, Lady Lashara might tell you to sell them as a peddler—"

"Eh?! Ah, that might be good."

The girl made her large eyes even rounder.

"Ahaha!"

Kenshi was also led into laughing with her. Wahanlyn didn't have the intimidating aura of Lashara or Chiaia; she was easy to talk to.

"Today is the student council's welcome party, right? See you after school then!"

Wahanlyn ran off energetically, her twin-tails swaying.

The work in the senior dormitory was varied. Starting with making beds in each room, it included collecting laundry, cleaning, repairing clothes and study tools, and preparing meals—it covered all general housework as well as renovation work on the buildings.

It was on his way back to the kitchen after finishing the delivery of lunch boxes.

"Oh, what a coincidence to meet you in a place like this."

"Lady Maria and Ms. Yukine, hello."

Maria Nanadan was a princess of the Kingdom of Havoniwa and also Lashara’s cousin. Yukine Mea was Maria's attendant, who usually kept her eyes downcast. Though she was a person of few words, she possessed a beauty that particularly caught the eye, even among the many beautiful Holy Mechanoid Masters.

"Are you having lunch now?"

Kenshi said, looking at the basket Yukine was holding. Yukine nodded slightly, looking somewhat embarrassed. Her straight silver hair swayed a little, reflecting the sunlight from the window. Since the weather was nice today, it looked like it would be pleasant to eat outside.

"By the way, I hear you are being worked quite hard by Lashara Earth."

"Uhm well, hahahaha."

Maria was refined in her speech, but her basic personality was very similar to Lashara’s. That was exactly why a slight misalignment in their gears made them clash.

"According to what I heard from Lady Aura, you have been hunting in the forest. Knowing that greedy woman, I wonder if she isn't even providing you with proper meals?"

"N-no, it's not like that. Hunting is a hobby, and she treats me well enough."

"Is that so? Weren't you told to earn your own keep?"

Kenshi flinched.

He involuntarily grimaced.

"Heehee, you are quite honest, aren't you?"

Maria lifted the corner of her lips in satisfaction. Being so similar to her cousin, her intuition was sharp.

"How pitiful....."

Yukine patted Kenshi's head with a sorrowful expression. Kenshi felt he had to follow up soon, or things might become troublesome later.

"No, really, I'm fine. Thank you for your concern."

"If you find it unbearable, you are welcome to come to me anytime."

"I see..."

"If it’s you, Sir Kenshi, I would welcome it."

"They really are quite alike....."

The eyes looking at Kenshi were gentle, yet they possessed a pressurized aura similar to Lashara’s.

"Did you say something?"

"It's nothing!"

Kenshi left the spot as if fleeing.

After finishing the repair work on the dormitory’s outer wall after school, he headed to the Student Council room a little early. He thought there might be something he could help with, but it seemed a certain trouble had just occurred.

"This is a problem."

"I... I am deeply sorry."

In the hallway in front of the Student Council room, a female student was bowing her head to Lithia Po Cheena. Lithia was the granddaughter of the current Pope of the Church and the current Student Council President.

"But I wonder if we can make arrangements in time, even if we start now...."

A tall, brown-skinned woman put her hand to her chin in thought. She was the Princess of the Shurifon Kingdom and a Dark Elf, Aura Shurifon. Kenshi had a connection with Aura from when she had saved his life previously, and she looked out for him in various ways.

"Um—is something the matter?"

Aura explained in her stead.

"There was an error in the arrangements for the dinner banquet to be served at today's welcome party. It seems the quantity is somewhat insufficient."

"I-I am terribly sorry!"

The female student, who appeared to be Lithia’s attendant, bowed deeply once more and apologized.

"In that case, should I bring some ingredients I gathered in the forest?"

"Don't be ridiculous! Putting out such suspicious things would affect the prestige of the Student Council!"

"Is that so?...That forest is a treasure trove of ingredients, though," Kenshi said, looking slightly dissatisfied. However, Aura nodded happily, pleased to hear the forest they managed being praised.

"Lithia, the things Kenshi gathers are first-rate ingredients. Wouldn't those accustomed to ordinary luxury find something fresh and full of rustic charm more appealing? Of course, I personally guarantee the taste."

While some members of the Student Council were recommended by the general student body, most were sons and daughters of royalty and nobility.

"That has nothing to do with wild animals."

Lithia, glancing at Kenshi through her glasses, spoke as bluntly as ever. Perhaps because she was a serious person who was strict with everyone, her attitude toward Kenshi was somewhat cold and austere.

"Rustic charm, is it..... You certainly have a way with words."

Lithia looked back and forth between Kenshi and Aura with suspicion.

"I suppose it can't be helped. We don't have much time, so I shall show some respect to Aura's wishes."

"Understood. I'll go right away."

Kenshi said so and immediately headed for the forest.

The welcome party was held in a buffet style and concluded without a hitch. The dishes made with the ingredients provided by Kenshi were unexpectedly popular, and Lithia breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good work. You were a help... Wild Animal."

Lithia said so, but she had a complicated look on her face. That feeling of reluctance was not directed at Kenshi, but at herself. As a serious perfectionist, she likely could not forgive the fact that she had to obtain help from someone else.

"I'm glad I could be of use."

When Kenshi replied with a smile, his innocent demeanor seemed to draw the venom out of Lithia, and her expression softened.

At that moment, the door was flung open with great force. The sound was so loud that everyone in the room turned their attention to the door.

"Aaan~, Kenshi-chan, is it over already?"

A tall woman raised her voice as she rushed toward Kenshi. She hugged Kenshi's neck and rubbed her cheek against his.

"M-Mezaia Sis....."

She was a female teacher who instructed general martial arts at the Holy Land Academy. She insisted that Kenshi call her "Big Sister."

"I don't like that—no way! I wanted to deepen my bond with Kenshi-chan while eating and saying 'ahhh'..."

"S-Sister..... Mezaia-sensei!"

Chiaia turned red with embarrassment and grabbed Mezaia by the scruff of the neck, rebuking her selfishness, but Mezaia would not listen.

"Then, let's start the after-party now!"

"Eh?"

Surprised voices leaked from the remaining members. Actually, since Kenshi and Chiaia were not members of the student council but merely attendants, they had been staying quiet by the wall.

"Wh-whoa, what are you doing?"

Mezaia crossed her arms and looked around at everyone with a triumphant face for some reason.

"You know the rules of the after-party, don't you?"

"B-but that was....."

Lithia was desperately resisting in a panic for some reason.

"Ohoho, isn't that interesting?"

Lashara smiled wickedly, as if she were plotting something.

"Sister....."

And she was also Chiaia’s biological older sister. Chiaia pulled Mezaia away from Kenshi with an exasperated face. Perhaps tired of dealing with Mezaia, Lithia grabbed Kenshi by the scruff of his neck as if handing over a cat.

"Fine. Since the Wild Animal is free to be taken home, go ahead and hold your after-party in your own rooms."

"Eh, really?"

"Hey! Kenshi is my attendant! Do not just take him away as you please!"

"Oh my, knowing such a fun thing was happening, I would have skipped the faculty meeting to come!"

"This is a welcome party for the students!"

Chiaia interjected immediately, but Mezaia didn't seem to care. Then, looking at her surroundings, she lowered her eyebrows into a sad 'eight' shape.

"Is there no food left?"

"Unfortunately....."

Lithia said they were just about to start cleaning up.

"Rule?"

Even when Kenshi asked, no one answered.

"I was bored with a party that was merely refined."

"Well, certainly, for somebody who is unrefined, it might've been dull."

"You say that, yet you were doing nothing but yawning yourself."

"Oh, I didn't say I was talking about you, did I?"

The gazes of Lashara and Maria clashed, sparks flying between them.

"Fufufu..... I must make sure you suffer a great embarrassment."

"There is no need for that. Because I am the one who will win. Right, Yukine?"

"Yes....."

When the conversation was turned to her, Yukine nodded firmly despite her reserved manner. Seeing that, Lashara raised her eyebrows sharply. She then turned sharply toward Kenshi and Chiaia.

Wahanlyn, seeing the glint in Lashara's eyes, felt something incredibly bad and fearfully raised her hand.

"Um—Lady Lashara, I don't feel very well, so can I go home?"

"No."

"Ehh—"

But Wahanlyn's words were rejected with a single phrase.

"Wahanlyn..... it's sneaky of you to try and escape alone."

Chiaia comforted the tearful Wahanlyn with a look of surrender.

"Um, I don't really follow this conversation....."

"Of course, Kenshi-chan will participate too, right?"

"Uh....."

Looking at Wahanlyn and Chiaia, it was clear how he should respond.

"I-I have cleaning to do, and I have an early morning tomorrow, so....."

"What are you saying? What is an attendant for if not to accompany their master? Come here quickly."

"Gueh!"

Lashara, holding the collar Kenshi was made to wear as a substitute for a dormitory permit, dragged him toward the adjacent room that was to be the venue.

"Tonight, there is no curfew or lights out! It’s a 'no-holds-barred' all-nighter, ha-ha-ha-ha!"

It seemed the night had only just begun.

In the end, there were nine participants in the after-party: Kenshi, Mezaia, Lashara, Chiaia, Wahanlyn, Aura, Maria, Yukine, and Lithia. Remarkably, Kenshi was the only male.

They moved to the Student Council President's office, which Lithia used as her private room, and new food was lined up on the table. These were backup ingredients that hadn't been served at the buffet, most of which Kenshi had prepared.

"What is the rule of the after-party?"

Kenshi, having finished helping with the preparations, asked about the thing he was curious about.

"First, we draw lots to decide the 'Goddess,' and that person gets to order the others to do whatever she likes. But you don't specify a specific person; you specify a number drawn by lots. For example, 'Number Three, please do this,'" Wahanlyn answered with a sigh.

"That's....."

[.....No matter how I think about it, it's the King's Game.....]

He remembered playing it with his stepsisters. Of course, Kenshi was never allowed to be the King. However, there was a part that was slightly different.

"But why is the Goddess the one being ordered? Isn't it the other way around?"

"The original version passed down by the 'Otherworlder' indeed had the Goddess giving orders, but... you see, Holy Mechanoid Masters and royalty/nobility are the privileged class, so it's natural for them to give orders to someone, right?"

"......So it's the reverse?"

Even so, the fact that someone would be ordered by someone else remained the same. He could roughly predict what kind of situation would be triggered, and his outlook grew dark.

"When Lady Lashara and Lady Maria get mixed together, it becomes something incredible.... Long ago, at the New Year's party in Sitreille....."

Chiaia looked troubled, perhaps remembering that time.

Everyone held their breath, focusing intently on Messiah’s mouth.

"I wonder if it’ll be okay..." "Write your name with your hips."

Ignoring Kenshi’s anxiety, the game began. Thin sticks acting as lots were distributed. Messiah closed one eye and spoke happily.

"Heh, so they use disposable chopsticks here too..." "What do you mean 'here'? It’s the same even in the highlands, isn't it?" Standing next to him, Wahanly tilted her head curiously at Kenshi’s monologue.

"Hie!" A short scream rang out. Aside from Lashara and Chiaia, the fact that Kenshi was from another world was a secret. Officially, he was from the highlands and was supposedly unfamiliar with the customs of the Sea of Ena.

"That’s... T-to think that I... I-I have to do hip-writing... M-Messiah-sensei, that is far too heartless!" Using language like a lady-in-waiting who had been assigned an impossible task, Lithia protested, her face turning pale.

"Who is the Goddess~?" All the participants shouted the call in unison, checking their lots at the same time.

"Oh my, it’s me." Lithia looked at the chopstick marked with the winning sign, looking troubled. "Oh dear, if you’re shrinking back at something like this, you won’t be able to handle the orders coming later," Messiah said nonchalantly, a happy yet terrifying glint in her eyes. "Come on, do it in the center so everyone can see."

"Then, Person Number Three, give me your order." "Ugh." In that instant, Messiah’s eyes flashed. A prickle of tension ran through Lithia. Kenshi met Lithia’s eyes. Knowing Messiah, there was no telling what she might say.

"Go easy on me... Messiah-sensei." "Ufufu, well then, since it’s the first one, I'll give a light order..." "Kenshi-chan, make sure you watch closely. Otherwise, it won’t be a punishment game."

"Kh..." Lithia’s previously pale face was now bright red. While Chiaia and Wahanly watched her pityingly, Lashara and Aura found it hilarious.

"The hip-writing of a girl who might one day become the Pope!" "Lithia, you're cute!" Aura cheered playfully. "Ugh, remember this!"

Lithia swayed her hips back and forth, tracing out her name. After being rejected and told to restart multiple times by Messiah and Lashara, she was finally released.

"Kh, this is a humiliation!" As Lithia grew frustrated with tears welling in her eyes, Aura did her best to soothe her. The entertainment had only just begun.

The moment the Goddess was decided and the number of the person to give the order was called, the atmosphere of the room became incredibly tense. The marks written on the tips of the chopsticks determined everyone's fate.

"Kukuku... Ah-hahaha! Finally, Maria is the Goddess!" Lashara wore a truly malicious expression, watching everyone's faces. On the other hand, Maria remained calm, or tried to maintain a calm expression, though she couldn't hide her agitation.

"Nfufufu, well, while looking at Maria's face, decide on the number that will give the order." Maria grinned. Something like fear mingled in the expressions of those present.

"...Five..." Then, Maria paused her words and licked her lips. Having seen everyone's reaction, she tried to maintain a poker face so her thoughts wouldn't be read. "No, Number Seven? No, Number Six... just kidding... Number Two."

While watching Lashara’s expression intently, Maria declared the number with a particularly loud voice. "Ha-haha! You fell for it!" Lashara twisted her mouth into a very happy smirk and showed the stick with "Number Two" written on it. "Kh!"

"Now then, the Goddess shall crawl between the legs of Number One and bark like a dog!" "Eh? Me?" Number One was Kenshi. He timidly held up the chopstick marked with Number One.

"Wait a moment! I designate one more person!" "What?" The person designated by the Goddess was not necessarily limited to one. However, if the order became complicated, things often became troublesome.

"I see! You're putting your hopes on Yukine. But the rule is that the designated person must speak. You understand that, Goddess?" "Of course!" "Good resolve... then, Person Number Five!" Then, Yukine stood up with the Number Five chopstick in hand.

"What?! Number Five was supposed to be Chiaia!" Lashara glared at Yukine with a surprised face. "Supposed to be? Whatever could you mean?" Lithia said with a smile like a mother who had caught someone playing a prank.

She had noticed that Lashara had secretly peeked at Chiaia’s lot when they were drawn. This was because if Lashara became the Goddess, she knew Chiaia would give her an order that wouldn't cause embarrassment.

Exchanging chopsticks beforehand was not a rule violation. It was the loss of Lashara, who had overlooked the scene in her joy of winning.

"Please make me the Goddess." Normally, being the Goddess and receiving an order was a joy. In this case, it was judged that Yukine’s order was harsher, so it took priority.

"Um, Yukine-san, is this okay?" While Lashara and Maria bickered beside them, Kenshi asked Yukine. Even if she was an attendant, he felt the order was a bit much. "It's fine." Yukine nodded slightly and looked down embarrassedly.

Yukine got on all fours and turned only her head toward Kenshi. It was a voice so shy it felt like it might fade away. "...Woof woof."

"Ugh! Damn it..." Kenshi looked at the ceiling, trying his best not to watch. He felt incredibly awkward. "Um..." "Giggle." Then, Yukine called out to him. Maria turned away with a composed face.

As she crawled through, Kenshi looked down at the bright red Yukine. "Ohhh!" A cheer rose from the surroundings all at once. "S-so cute..." Kenshi muttered unintentionally, but it was perhaps fortunate that his voice reached no one.

"Hey, will you let go of that?!" "Why? You're the one who should let go!"

Lashara and Maria were pulling at a single lot. Lithia, who held the lots, looked troubled and scratched her head. "Why are they so obsessed with that one?" Kenshi tilted his head in wonder.

"Well, by the middle of the game, people start putting marks on the Goddess lot." "Ah, I see..." Some people would put a mark only they could recognize on the Goddess lot when drawing or after drawing it.

"Lashara-sama is the type who won't choose her methods when it comes to winning." Chiaia spoke as if it were only natural, even while looking exasperated. Kenshi felt something was a bit off, but let it go.

The struggle for the lot continued. Finally, growing impatient, Lashara used her free hand to grab Maria’s breast firmly. "Kyaa!" In the gap created when Maria screamed and flinched, Lashara pulled the chopstick out with all her might. She held it high, but Maria, having regained her footing, jumped and swiped it away. Her long skirt flared out, making her petticoat fully visible, but she didn't care.

"Ah!" The chopstick spun through the air and landed right in Kenshi’s hand. "Kenshi, hand that over!" "Yukine, take it away quickly!"

"No way. Fighting over a lot once it's drawn is against the spirit of the game. The next Goddesses are Maria-san and Lashara-san." "W-why me and Maria!"

Messiah grabbed Lashara and Maria by their collars and held them down. Even against the Princess-Queen of the Shurifon Empire and the Princess of the Havoniwa Kingdom, they were no match for Messiah.

"Now, who are you two choosing? You can't pick the number you two were just fighting over." "Kh... then... Number Four!" "Then I am Number Four as well!" If the person giving the order was only one person, the damage would be less.

"M-me?" With a bewildered face, Kenshi showed his Number Four chopstick.

"Alright, Kenshi, order me to do whatever I want with Maria!" "What do you think you're doing, giving the order yourself!" "Ugh..."

If he gave a strange order to Lashara and Maria, the aftermath would be too terrifying. "Come, no need for restraint. I won't be angry no matter what the order is." "She'll definitely be angry," Chiaia whispered beside him.

"Then, for Lashara-sama to Maria-sama..." The moment he said that much, a chill ran down his spine. The eyes of everyone who sympathized with the teary-eyed Yukine were terrifying. "Um, well, for Maria-sama to Lashara-sama... ugh." This time it was Lashara and Chiaia. It could already be described as bloodlust. It seemed that no matter how he ordered them, he was destined to see hell.

"Please hug each other and say you won't fight anymore." To be honest, it was a desperate move. But laughter erupted from the surroundings all at once. "Now that's a masterpiece!"

“That’s a good idea for a wild animal.”

The people there said that one after another, and even Yukine and Kyaia held back their laughter.

“Kuh! I shall choose someone else as well……”

Saying that, he looked at Lashara.

“I suppose I should be a little more careful.....”

Perhaps the atmosphere of the place and the anxious, puppy-like eyes of Kenshi had taken the edge off her irritation, for Lashara rested her cheek on her hand and muttered.

“Good, good.”

Mezaia closed one eye and laughed happily.

This time, the goddess was Kyaia. The number she called out was—Lashara was about to say something, but she closed her mouth. From the situation around her, she judged that no matter who was chosen, there was no possibility that Kenshi’s command would be overturned.

[“Gyaaa!”] [“Gyoeeeee!”]

Still, Lashara and Maria let out silent screams as they clung tightly to each other. To an onlooker, it was quite a heartwarming sight.

“.....W-we will no longer quarrel.”

In voices that sounded as though they echoed up from the depths of hell, Lashara and Maria said this. At that moment, loud applause broke out around them.

They had probably expended a great deal of mental energy; Lashara and Maria collapsed right where they stood.

“Damn you, Kenshi……”

Lashara looked up weakly at Kenshi. But Maria, sighing, said,

“Did people really think we were on such bad terms that we’d receive this much applause?”

“Ho ho ho, once again it’s my victory.”

Mezaia, grinning from ear to ear, held up a pair of disposable chopsticks.

“Well then, number two will play the Pocky Game.”

“Eh!?”

Kyaia waited in confusion for number two to step forward.

“It’s me.....”

When Kenshi raised his hand, the atmosphere instantly grew excited.

“No——”

Kyaia’s face stiffened as she stepped backward.

“Go die. You should die right now!”

In her agitation, Kyaia said something outrageous.

The Pocky Game was a game in which two people bit down on opposite ends of a chocolate-coated biscuit stick and ate toward the center; the team that managed to

shorten it the most within the time limit won. If it broke midway or their lips touched, they lost—but admittedly, that was often what made it more exciting.

“Then the opposing team will be number six and number eight.”

By coincidence, those numbers were Maria and Yukine.

“The losing team will receive a punishment, so do your best.”

She said it lightly, but since it was Mezaia, there was no doubt a ridiculous punishment awaited.

“This is interesting! Kyaia and Kenshi, you absolutely must win!”

Lashara, wanting to see Maria’s punishment, put pressure on them.

“Kyaia, do your best! Kenshi too!”

Since it did not affect him, Wahanly irresponsibly cheered them on.

“Come on, hold each other’s shoulders. Fix your bodies and faces firmly in place.”

Mezaia grabbed Kenshi and Kyaia by the arms and forcibly turned them to face one another. When Kyaia ended up in a pose as though embracing a lover with Kenshi, she exclaimed,

“Your face is too close!”

The instant their eyes met, she turned bright red and arched her head back. Kyaia desperately tried to move her face away, but that would not make for a game. Maria and Yukine were already prepared.

“H-hey, you understand, right!?”

“Ehffo, whaf?”

Since Kenshi was holding the Pocky in his mouth, his words were unclear.

Kyaia tried to retort, but Mezaia cut her off.

“All right, all right, we’re starting. Bite down properly.”

Without further discussion, Mezaia pressed the Pocky against Kyaia's lips. Blushing, Kyaia faced Kenshi.

"Okaaay, start."

At the signal, Kenshi puckered his lips and began eating little by little. He did not taste the chocolate at all.

Kyaia shut her eyes tightly and ate at a fast pace. In no time, the distance between their lips shrank.

With only a few centimeters left, Kyaia suddenly stopped moving. The vibration ceased. Both Kenshi and Kyaia froze, unable to move. If they went any further, their lips would touch. Both of them turned completely red and stiffened like statues.

"What are you doing? You can still go further!"

Lashara shouted right beside Kenshi. Glancing sideways to confirm that their lips were about to touch, Maria and Yukine had progressed to a rather daring point. Yukine looked embarrassed, but Maria continued without hesitation.

Kyaia's eyes seemed to ask what he was going to do. Even if asked, Kenshi did not know what to do either.

"I will never allow you to lose to Maria!"

Saying that, Lashara forcibly began pushing the back of Kenshi's head.

"Hey!?"

["……It's going to break!"]

Wahanly joined in the mischief as well, and as Kenshi was pushed forward, the Pocky jutted out. The only way to keep it from breaking was to keep eating.

Mezaia's voice rang out mercilessly. Maria and Yukine's Pocky had already been reduced to only a few millimeters. Even without Kenshi and Kyaia's Pocky breaking, the outcome was obvious. Yet Maria continued eating, and finally went so far as to kiss Yukine.

"Damn you, Maria!"

Lashara ground her teeth as she watched.

Kyaia opened her eyes wide and cried out something in the back of her throat. And then, at the very moment their lips were about to touch—so close it was at the limit—her footing suddenly wavered.

“.....”

Her lips nearly slipped away from the Pocky, and in reflex she bit down. That was her mistake.

With a snap, the Pocky broke into two, fragments scattering.

“Ahhh!”

Lashara’s scream echoed through the student council room.

“All right, that’s the match,” Mezaia declared.

Suddenly, Lashara shoved Kenshi aside and thrust her lips toward Kyaia as though to kiss her.

“Lady Lashara!?”

Only then did Lashara and the surrounding students notice that Lashara and Maria’s faces were unnaturally red.

“What? What is it? What are you looking at? Hic—”

“Eh? Don’t tell me…… you’re drunk?”

Along with a hiccup, a faint smell of alcohol drifted from Lashara.

“We did not serve any alcohol. What is going on?”

“Lady Lashara!”

Litia looked suspiciously from Kenshi to Aura. The drinks had been water, tea, and fresh fruit juice—nothing strange.

“It’s this.....”

Aura stared intently at the ingredients on the plate. It was one of the spare fruits Kenshi had brought a few days earlier.

“When this fruit ripens, it contains trace amounts of alcohol.”

“Oh.....”

Kenshi picked up the fruit and smelled it. Now that it was mentioned, there was indeed a faint alcoholic scent.

“This is no time to be impressed!”

Kyaia rushed forward anxiously and shook Lashara by both shoulders.

“Lady Lashara, please get a hold of yourself.”

“It’s fine. It’s only the amount used in sweets, so it will wear off quickly. Even so, you two are rather weak with alcohol.”

As if to say there was no need to worry, Aura lightly patted Kyaia’s shoulder.

“I am not drunk!”

“It just feels pleasantly floaty.”

“Me as well.”

Lashara and Maria had completely begun speaking and acting like drunkards.

Even so, it seemed that this was not enough to hinder the progress of the after-party.

“Well then, Kenshi-chan and Kyaia will receive their punishment.”

“Wait, sister!”

“Here, it’s Mezaia-sensei, right?”

Still smiling faintly, Mezaia admonished Kyaia.

“When it comes to a punishment, it’s that, isn’t it?”

Wahanly gave a meaningful chuckle.

“You’re joking, right?”

“Do you think I’m joking?”

“Ugh.”

At Kyaia’s protest, Mezaia closed one eye, her gaze gleaming suspiciously. Kyaia had no retort.

Then Lithia brought out something like a rolled-up mat from a locker in the room.

“This is.....”

Even Kenshi was struck speechless.

On the mat were neatly drawn circles in blue, yellow, green, and red. No one questioned why such a thing was there. It was clearly a mat for the Twister game.

It was a simple game of placing the designated hands and feet on the designated colors, but if one did it carelessly without thinking ahead, one would end up exposing an indecent posture. Moreover, with two people on the mat, it was not hard to imagine what might happen.

“Hehe, the one who loses will have an even more embarrassing punishment waiting.”

“Again with that?”

Apparently, she intended to tease them to the very end. In contrast to the earlier excitement, everyone except Kenshi and Kyaia was now relaxed, since they were only watching. All of them grinned as they observed the two.

“Why do I have to do something like this...”

“Don’t complain. You lost, so it can’t be helped.”

“It’s because sister, uhm i mean… Mezaia-sensei suggested such a punishment.”

Chiaia continued to grumble and complain incessantly, but Kenshi found it strange that she still followed along without going home. He thought it might be some kind of "situational magic."

"I’m betting five hundred on Kenchi-chan!"

"I don't want to do Messiah-nee-chan's punishment game either!"

"I've got two hundred on Kenchi."

Everyone was making predictions as they pleased, and they had even started betting. Banknotes were flying around flashily.

"Right hand on red... Red, you say?"

The physical range of motion was fixed. It was difficult to breathe.

"St-stop it, ahn!"

When Kenchi flailed his face around seeking oxygen, Chiaia let out a suspicious-sounding voice.

"I-I told you not to move!"

"It's fine. In your case, it’s a game of Twister with just the two of you in a room."

"That is not fine!"

The red mark was right in front of Chiaia's eyes. However, for Chiaia to place her hand there, she had to lean her body forward. And Kenchi's crotch was right there.

"Y-you, pull your hips back more!"

"That's mean..."

"I can't go any further!"

He had already pulled back to his limit.

"Why are your legs so short!?"

And using the figures of Kenchi and Chiaia as a side dish to their drinks, the rest of the group was getting very excited.

"Two hundred on Kenchi's win!"

"Wouldn't it be Lady Chiaia here? It seems Master Kenchi is being reserved and can't do anything."

"I... think so too..."

"Hmm, I'm putting three hundred on Chiaia. Nyahahahaha!"

Chiaia's thighs were already starting to tremble and convulse, but she desperately continued to endure while straddling Kenchi's face.

"I-if you look up, I'll really kill you!"

"B-but—"

Chiaia's long skirt had flipped up significantly, leaving her in a rather risky position.

"Kenchi, lose already!"

It was Chiaia who was pressing her chest against him. Even though Kenchi's physical strength was monstrous and he could endure even in strange poses, he had his limits.

"But if I lose, I don't know what Lady Lashara will do to me..."

"Since it's Messiah-sensei, the damage will definitely be greater if I'm the one who loses!"

Chiaia stood there dazed with teary eyes. Kenchi was still maintaining his strange pose on the mat.

"Left foot on green means... like this?"

While confirming the position of his left foot from between his legs, Kenchi shifted his body slightly backward. Then, Chiaia, who had been leaning about half her weight on Kenchi, lost her balance and fell onto him.

"Kyaaaa!"
Along with Chiaia's scream, a soft sensation was transmitted from near the top of his head. When Kenchi reflexively looked up, his face was sandwiched between soft things.

"W-what are you doing! Get off me!"

Chiaia turned bright red and was desperately enduring. Kenchi was relatively fine in any posture, but unexpectedly, Chiaia also continued to persist. She must have really hated the next punishment game.

It was then, as they began arguing in their compromising positions, that a faint vibration was transmitted. A sound like a low groan echoed from the ground.

"Eh? An earthquake?"

As the sound grew louder, Chiaia's scream echoed through the night sky. The night was still young.

The vibration stopped immediately along with Chiaia's shrill scream. It wasn't a major tremor. It was a micro-vibration, like a small upward thrust, that shook the building only slightly.

"Kyaaaaa!"

It was the kind of thing a dull person wouldn't even notice. But someone who wasn't dull was right nearby.

"Ah..."

Chiaia held her head and dove under the table.

"...Now that you mention it, you always did hate earthquakes."

"Sister..."

"Yes, Chiaia loses. Kenchi-chan wins! Now then, I wonder what the next punishment game should be?"

"Noooooo!"

It seemed there was no mercy. And thus, the madness continued until morning. It went without saying that the next day, person after person fell asleep during class.

"Ho ho ho, it's a 'flower' including not just both hands but both feet, isn't it?"

The tall old man laughed happily while looking at the 3D projection monitor.

"If a bigger vibration occurred, it would have gone 'mwah' like this..."

"This is exactly the privilege, or rather the real pleasure, of being an inhabitant of another world."

A chubby old man and a white-haired old man also wore malicious smiles.

"Uhihi, it was I who brought in that Pocky game and Twister game. It makes me happy to see them so well-rooted even now. Even so, Nauka's girl has become quite sexy—"

"You lecherous old geezer."

"Hihi, I'll take that as a compliment."

The tall old man didn't seem to care at all about the jab. The chubby old man accepted it with a lustful laugh.

"Are we likely to get a stable output from the thought-entity then?"

"We're still a little short on energy. Should we divert some from the other Barrier Furnaces?"

"If we do it too flashily, it will become a hassle later."

The tall old man placed a hand on his chin and thought for a moment.

"A long-term maintenance isn't necessary. As long as we can share sensations, materialization is unneeded."

"Truly, that lecherous spirit of yours is something to admire."

"Weren't you the ones who jumped on my bandwagon?"

"Fo-fo-fo."

"Don't try to laugh it off!"

"Hahahaha!"

The white-haired old man laughed happily at the banter between the tall old man and the chubby old man.

Episode 2:

"I'm off!"

Under a clear sky without a single cloud, Kenchi dashed out of the independent dormitory energetically.

"Kenchi-chan, good morning!"

"Good morning!"

"Kenchi-chaaan, good luck with work!"

"Yes! Thank you very much!"

Along the way to the dorm, female students called out to him many times. Kenchi waved back while running lightly along the school route. In the Holy Land's underground facility, everyone he passed exchanged pleasant greetings with him.

When Kenchi stepped into Central Control, the supervisor, Hanna, was talking to a young staff member, looking somewhat troubled.

"Good morning."

The functions of the Holy Land were centrally managed here.

"Kenchi, huh? Morning. You're energetic today too."

When the supervisor, Hanna, noticed Kenchi, she immediately smiled and raised a hand.

Kenchi had been called upon to help with all sorts of chores, ranging from repairing clothing and facilities to serving as a laundry assistant. Recently, his role as a "surge assistant" in the baths had also been a great success in a way—though it was said the side effects were too strong and it was now prohibited.

"Um, is something wrong?"

"Hmm? No, it's nothing major. We were just discussing countermeasures because the energy leakage from the Barrier Furnace has become noticeable."

"Is it going to be okay?"

"Well, it's not a problem at this level."

Hanna shrugged her shoulders and ended the conversation with the staff member, leaving a note to watch the situation for a while longer.

"Today, engineers from Havoniwa are coming for technical guidance."

"Havoniwa... that's Lady Maria's country, right?"

"That's right."

Crafts such as lace knitting and braided cords were famous products of the Kingdom of Havoniwa and were one of its major industries.

"Kenchi, you should take the workshop too. It's a rare opportunity, and you'll gain something from it."

"Yes!"

Work at the upperclassmen's dormitory was varied. Bed-making, laundry, lunch preparation—and though it was currently banned, he had even been part of the aesthetician staff.

In one of the repair rooms in the basement, three engineers from Havoniwa had arrived. Among them was a familiar face.

"Oh? Isn't that Yukine-san?"

"Kenchi..."

After looking at Kenchi with a slightly surprised face, Yukine looked down bashfully for some reason.

"Oh, what's this? Are you two acquaintances?"

Josie, the group leader, looked back and forth between Kenchi and Yukine. Knowing the relationship between Lashara and Maria, Josie was worried about the relationship between the two.

"Kenchi is... a friend..."

"Heh, Maria-sama’s attendant, huh? Kenshi is quite skilled."

"Eh?"

Yukine, who had not expected an immediate reply, blinked in surprise as she looked at what Kenshi had woven. Then, her eyes widened significantly.

"Do you have experience with lace knitting?"

"I don't, but I’ve made various things with woolen yarn by mimicking my older sister."

"I-I see. Then how about this?"

The lace needle moved a bit more intricately than before.

Others had surely wanted to receive instruction as well, but no one could cut in.

"How is it going over here—whoa!"

A male engineer let out a cry of surprise, completely stunned by the lace Kenshi had woven. A magnificent handkerchief, incorporating various techniques, was being knitted at an overwhelming speed. The male engineer pulled his own handkerchief from his pocket and compared the two.

"This was something I received from my former master... no, rather..."

"I can't believe it..."

It didn’t even pale in comparison; it was actually superior. Josie pounded Kenshi on the back jokingly.

"Well then, it would be good for Kenshi to be instructed by Yukine-san."

"Yes, I look forward to working with you today."

"Likewise..."

The content of the lecture was a basic exercise: adorning a handkerchief with lace. Though Kenshi was someone who could handle mending without difficulty, he could not

manage a specialized technique like this without the proper knowledge. Once he was taught how to hold the lace needle and thread, the instruction began from the absolute basics.

"Pass the needle through this part... and then weave this thread in..."

"Mm-hmm."

Kenshi sat down next to Yukine. Her cheeks flushed slightly red.

"Can you do this?"

"Hehe, she’s surprised, she’s surprised..."

While staring at Yukine’s hands, Kenshi manipulated the lace needle in the exact same way she did.

"Then, Kenshi, give it a tr…"

Just like before, the moment Yukine finished speaking, Kenshi held out what he had woven.

"You're good..."

Behind the buzzing engineers, Josie was not particularly surprised; she smiled with satisfaction, acting as if it were only natural that Kenshi could do something of this level.

"How is it?"

Kenshi showed his work before Yukine could even finish her sentence. Yukine let out a sound that was half-sigh, half-gasp, and her expression shifted to one of intense seriousness as she began teaching him dozens of different weaving styles.

"Young man, won't you come to our country?"

Kenshi absorbed everything wordlessly without even asking for clarification. He traced her movements without a single hitch. Once again, something identical down to the last millimeter was produced. Another male engineer came over and marveled at the handkerchief Kenshi had made.

"And to do this in such a short time..."

"I definitely want to introduce him to my master."

The engineers began their recruitment pitch with a hint of excitement.

"A-hem. My fellow engineers, such talk is..."

When Josie gave a deliberate cough, the engineers suddenly looked awkward and began making excuses, though they soon returned to praising Kenshi’s greatness.

"No, but someone of this caliber is usually..."

The engineers sent lingering glances toward Kenshi.

"Yukine-san, thank you very much."

"You're... welcome."

The technical instruction lecture ended, and after Kenshi thanked Yukine and the others, he returned to his regular work.

"That boy, who is he?"

"Lashara-sama’s attendant..."

"The one from Shitreiyu..."

While watching his retreating figure, they whispered into Yukine’s ear. The engineers groaned with complex expressions, muttering to one another about how there really were amazing people in this world.

Holy Land Academy was a place of learning for training Sacred Mechanists, but it was also used as a study-abroad destination for the upper class. Besides training to become a Sacred Mechanist, the classes included various subjects. There were natural sciences, history, politics, and economics, as well as special subjects that felt like "bride training," such as dancing, flower arrangement, and cooking. Physical education was one of those subjects. Since they could not exercise in uniforms with hems long enough to hide their ankles, they had to change into gym clothes.

When Lashara Earth entered the locker room to change, she found two female students talking excitedly.

"Hey, hey, did you see?"

"I saw, I saw!"

It seemed female students from the class that had physical education in the previous period were still there. Both had hair damp with sweat, with several strands sticking to their foreheads. They were still in their underwear.

"As expected of Maria-sama, she’s amazing, isn't she?"

They appeared to be in the middle of changing; their lower halves were bare.

"She was so dignified, but it was a bit of a strange pattern, wasn't it? Have you seen it before?"

"No. But it was a magnificent design, like something the royalty would use..."

The female students seemed to be ruminating on the memory, staring into space with enchanted expressions.

[...Did she say Maria?]

Lashara tried to feign composure but couldn't help eavesdropping. Other female students who overheard the conversation gathered around, and the excitement grew.

"I saw it too. It was lovely, wasn't it?"

"Royalty really is different in every single way..."

"What are you all talking about?"

Lashara reacted to the word "royalty" and spoke up without thinking.

"Ah, Lashara -sama."

The female students stopped their conversation and straightened up with tense expressions. However, one of them, perhaps too excited to read the room, began to explain volubly.

"Um, you see, Maria-sama’s petticoat is incredibly lovely!"

[...Idiot!]

Hushed voices of reprimand flew in from the surroundings.

"Everyone, hurry up!"

The female student who had been so slow to catch on finally realized the situation even with her dull head; her face turned pale and twitched. The teacher’s voice rang out, disrupting the atmosphere.

"I-I am truly sorry."

"Whatever for?"

Lashara feigned ignorance, acting as if she had done nothing to be apologized to for. If they let it slide now, they could pretend nothing had happened. It was a form of consideration on Lashara's part.

However, the shallow student was thoroughly airheaded.

"uhm... that... I am truly, truly sorry!"

If they had just brushed it off, it would have been fine, but when the girl bowed her head so desperately, it became impossible to ignore. Lashara wore a smile like a holy mother and gazed at the flustered student.

"Hmm. Well then, compared to mine, how did it look?"

"Um, about that... yes."

If she had answered that it was about the same as Lashara -sama’s, there would have been no problem. But the fact that she remained silent was proof that Maria’s was superior.

"Class has already started!"

The teacher’s scolding was a godsend for Lashara at that moment. As if released from a binding spell, the students hurriedly finished changing in silence and began leaving the locker room. The girls who had been comforting the crying student stole a glance at Lashara as they headed out. Lashara gave a slight, wordless smile, and the students headed outside looking relieved.

"Even so, that Maria girl..."

Dinner had a strangely stiff atmosphere. Kenshi felt uncomfortable in the awkward air but continued to move food to his mouth silently. Chiaia and Wahanly were also eating as if the food tasted bad, just like Kenshi. It was obvious that Lashara was the cause of the poor atmosphere. Lashara had a pouting expression and wouldn't say a word.

"Lashara -sama, what’s wrong? You seem to be in a really bad mood."

"Apparently, the topic of Maria-sama’s petticoat came up while they were changing..."

"Yikes, again?"

In response to Wahanly’s question, Chiaia answered with a resigned sigh.

"Eh, it’s nothing, nyahaha..."

"What are you mumbling about!"

"Hmph!"

At Wahanly’s dry laughter, Lashara crossed her arms with a rough snort.

"It’s not like I care about which underwear is better or being compared. I just don't like the fact that Maria thinks she won!"

Lashara spoke in a resolute tone.

"I don't think she's thinking that at all, though..."

Something similar had happened during the enrollment procedures, but at that time, Yukine had used her wit to smooth things over. It might have been better if both parties had been there for a direct confrontation.

"Which technique is superior... the prestige of the country is at stake."

"Is it really that big of a deal?"

Kenshi asked Chiaia in a whisper.

"No, no. That’s just a clash of wills. It’s less about national prestige and more a matter of a maiden's pride."

"My older sisters are the same way."

At Chiaia’s explanation, even Kenshi looked like he was about to sigh.

"Enough, Quiet you!"

Lashara had apparently overheard the conversation between Kenshi and Chiaia, and she slammed her fist onto the table.

Kenshi's cup tipped over, and he was drenched in water.

"How mean..."

Kenshi took out a handkerchief and wiped his wet hands. It was something he had just made in today's training session. He never thought he would be using it in a place like this.

"Where did you get that?" "Wow, it's so pretty..."

Chiaia and Wahanly focused their attention on the handkerchief Kenshi had made.

"This? Yukine-san taught me how to make it during the session." "You're quite skilled with your hands, aren't you?"

While Chiaia expressed admiration, she also wore a somewhat frustrated expression.

"Hehehe, even the engineers said it was amazing." "Heh—if you were praised by the Havoniwa engineers, that’s a big deal. Their technology is top-notch."

Wahanly looked at the handkerchief intently with a look of surprise. At Wahanly's words, Lashara suddenly stood up.

"You! Did you perhaps make someone's petticoat?" "Yes, I did about half of the embroidery on the one Yukine-san was making..." "I knew it was you who made Maria's petticoat!"

Only Kenshi failed to read the situation, looking back and forth between the faces of the three women.

"To think the cause of Lady Lashara's foul mood was Kenshi..."

Chiaia and Wahanly, who had suddenly let out "good grief" sighs, looked toward Lashara.

"Those people inside the palace will surely grumble behind my back! In this situation, the only thing to do is crush them with overwhelming force!" "Kenshi! Give up!"

Wahanly nodded vigorously at Lashara's emphasis. Chiaia, meanwhile, did not deny it while maintaining a complicated expression.

"If you understand, move at once." "Kenshi, it's an order."

Lashara smirked mischievously.

"Ugh, I have a bad feeling about this..."

It was a regular occurrence for Lashara to say something outrageous.

"Right now, go make my petticoat... no, make my underwear too. All of it, top and bottom! Make it something so luxurious it won't lose to Maria's!" "Eeeh!?! Underwear too!?" "Overwhelming force... isn't that practically like declaring a war?" "Yes, it is war! It is a matter staked on the nation's prestige!"

Before he knew it, the flow of events had been decided.

"My measurement data is with Nana..." "I don't think Maya-sama would give it to you if she knew how this came about."

Kenshi stood up instinctively. His hips were pulled back as if ready to flee at any moment.

"Lady Lashara... as expected, underwear is a bit..."

Chiaia tried to intervene as the voice of reason, but Lashara was not one to back down so easily.

"Then, are you saying it's fine for me to lose to Maria?" "Then wouldn't just a petticoat be enough?"

Kenshi also tried to soothe her, but he was overwhelmed instead.

"Naive! If we do that, people will just think we copied her! Even if it's slightly superior, those with loose tongues will talk!"

Chiaia looked around the dining hall.

"Speaking this loudly, it's only a matter of time before word spreads to someone." "Tch! Then verbal instructions are fine. From the top, seventy—" "Waaaaah!"

Feeling that if he heard the rest, he would be thrown into a place from which he could never return, Kenshi hurriedly covered his ears.

"Don't be ridiculous!"

Chiaia slapped him back and forth across the cheeks, making his vision flicker. It seemed Chiaia had brought the patterns and data sheets.

"This is Lady Lashara's measurement data." "Haaa..."

A massive sigh escaped him involuntarily.

"Use the repair room. I've already prepared the materials there. There should be some reference documents as well." "Lady Lashara won't listen once she starts saying something." "Even if you say that, a woman's underwear..." "It's too late. I told you this was an order. If you want, why not try making some for Chiaia too?" "Quit it! Either way, if you do a half-hearted job... you know what happens, right?"

He knew all too well the pushiness of a head of state and those close to her.

"But, what kind should I make?" "That's... I'm not familiar with it either." "Since the competition has started, it's sooner or later anyway. Well, since you're doing it, make something proper. If you leak this to anyone..."

Chiaia answered bluntly, looking somewhat embarrassed.

Thus, Kenshi was kicked out of the room.

When he returned to his own room and was at a loss, there was a knock on the door. He had rarely seen such things before. Even during his chores in the upperclassmen's dormitory, specialized people did the laundry, so he had never seen luxurious women's innerwear.

"Well, it's rare for Chiaia to be kind. I'll cooperate for now."

She told him as much. Before he knew it, the window outside had brightened.

In the independent dormitories for royalty and nobility, almost everything was provided.

"Yeah, thanks, Chiaia." "Oh right, I should tell you just in case, that measurement data is strictly confidential. If it leaks anywhere..." "I-I know!"

From then on, Kenshi set to work all through the night. Using some innerwear found in the repair room as a reference—though he didn't know who it belonged to—he applied the knitting techniques Yukine had taught him, incorporating plenty of lace. He moved the lace needles single-mindedly without even eating. The chirping of small birds announced the morning through the window.

What he made was an orthodox set of a white bra and shorts, along with a petticoat. Lashara was inspecting them in detail right in front of him. In the refreshing early morning, the situation was so surreal it made him feel dizzy.

"Hmm..."

Lashara groaned with a grim expression.

"How is it?" "Let's see..."

Wahanly also picked them up and observed them closely. The act of making women's innerwear was embarrassing enough, but having them looked at like this was equally awkward.

"The sewing is solid, and making this in one night is surprising, but the problem is the design." "The design?"

Kenshi looked at what he had made once more. Enduring his eyes flickering from lack of sleep, he focused on the fine lace patterns.

"To be blunt, it's a bit too... sexy. If Maya-sama saw this, she’d be furious, calling it indecent." "Hmm. It certainly looks a bit like something a prostitute would wear."

Wahanly tilted her head.

"Is that so? All my older sisters' stuff looks like this, though."

Kenshi had no way of judging what people of Lashara's age should wear.

"But I arranged this by using what was in the repair room as a reference." "The repair room...?"

As she spoke, Wahanly suddenly turned red and got angry.

"T-That was just there by chance for reference! It's not like I wear that kind of thing all the time!"

Wahanly began to make excuses desperately in a very fast tone.

"Oh, so those were yours, Wahanly." "Ugh. You’re being rude to a maiden!"

Lashara watched with warm eyes as Wahanly snapped at Kenshi.

"Well, you'll just have to do your best."

Lashara, who had been checking the set of shorts and bra during that time, looked up and handed down her judgment.

"This kind of design reminds me of an unpleasant woman. Redo it." "Sniff, sniff."

Kenshi's shoulders slumped in disappointment. A night's labor had gone to waste.

"But who is the unpleasant woman?"

"Maria's mother... but that doesn't matter! Don't come back to the dormitory until you make something I'm satisfied with."

Furthermore, Lashara was merciless.

"That's no good, Lady Lashara. If you say that, this guy might actually not come back." "Mm! True. I was told by Lithia not to let wild animals roam free."

Lashara seemed to remember that with Kenshi's survival skills, he could be self-sufficient indefinitely.

"Hey, Kenshi. I said it last night too, but since you're doing it, you have to win. Do you understand that?" "Y-Yeah..."

Lashara stared at the flashy underwear on the desk while blushing.

"Even I would be embarrassed to wear this." "It's not about the underwear! The petticoat is well-made, so as for the underwear..." "You've become quite soft on Kenshi. At that time, you pointed a sword at him..."

Saying that much, she realized Wahanly was present. Only Lashara and Chiaia knew that Kenshi was from another world. Until Kenshi was recognized by those around them as belonging to Lashara, the truth had to be hidden for a while longer.

"At that time?"

Wahanly stared at Lashara curiously.

"Stop!" Lashara's cry echoed through the air.

"If I am to be struck down by a Sacred Mechanoid Master of your caliber... it is not a bad way to go."

It was a line meant to buy time, but it was half-sincere. The opponent possessed enough skill to treat both Chiaia and Wahanly like children simultaneously.

"It is fine." However, aside from the "Ahou-intoxication," the young man's sword tip was trembling. It seemed he was not a villain at heart; there was likely some sort of circumstance behind his actions.

Just then, Chiaia came bursting through the terrace doors. Having stopped her blade at the very last second, Chiaia turned back.

"But! Not only did this person attack you, Princess, he intruded upon your private bedchambers! For a man to be permitted entry here is..."

Lashara spoke slowly, as if to soothe Chiaia. Chiaia seemed to regain her composure and relaxed the strength in her arms.

"I-if rumors spread that your purity has been compromised, it will affect the nation's prestige..."

"There is no problem as long as we remain silent. Besides, he is an important witness to this incident."

"Ugh... I understand."

The boy threw Chiaia aside without even looking back as she lunged from behind. But that appeared to be his limit. Perhaps unable to endure the "Ahou intoxication" any longer, the boy clutched his head and began to groan in agony.

Chiaia was not one to miss such an opening. She instantly dove into the boy's guard and slammed him to the ground. She mounted him, pinning him down so he could not resist. There were mountains of things she wanted to interrogate this boy about. She couldn't let him die just yet.

"Even so, to use one of the few male Sacred Mechanoid Masters as an assassin..."

"I wonder about him being an 'assassin.' If he were serious, we would have been finished by his first surprise attack."

"This guy! A... man?"

Chiaia stopped moving for a moment out of sheer surprise. However, she immediately swung her dagger down toward the boy's throat to deliver the finishing blow.

"That’s..."

It wasn't just the beginning; there had been numerous chances. It was evident from the hesitation he showed when he pointed his sword at Lashara The problem was that the Sacred Mechanoids, who were presumably his allies, had fled and left the boy behind.

"If the other side intends to treat him as a disposable pawn, then there should be no issue with us making him ours, right?"

"B-but!"

"A young, and moreover, powerful male Sacred Mechanoid Master... Don't you think he would make for a fine business prospect?"

With a male Sacred Mechanoid Master of this skill level, applicants for marriage would come rushing in. Just thinking about how much profit that would generate made her

heart dance. No matter what, she wanted to keep this boy for herself. Lashara smirked at the massive mental calculations she was making.

Although he had been kicked out and told not to return to the dorm until it was finished, Kenshi’s work remained the same. In the underground facility, following yesterday's schedule, the technicians from Havoniwa had come again today to provide technical guidance. Yukine was also giving advice on the practice pieces of each person attending the lecture.

"Kenshi, your eyes are red. Lack of sleep?"

"Ugh, I stayed up all night a bit..."

"You shouldn't overdo it..."

Yukine chided Kenshi with an expression that was hard to place—somewhere between troubled and caring.

"Things just happened and I ended up having to make women's innerwear, but I can't seem to make it well."

"Innerwear... Kenshi, do you like that sort of thing?"

Yukine whispered softly, her cheeks staining red.

"Eh!? Uh, it's not about liking or disliking it, it's for Lady Lashara !"

Kenshi became flustered and accidentally let the truth slip. He certainly couldn't say he had been ordered to produce underwear to compete with Maria.

"Kenshi, if you are troubled... consult with me."

Yukine stared fixedly at him while stroking Kenshi’s head.

"Ugh!"

When stared at with such beauty and eyes as pure as a puppy's, he felt an incredible sense of guilt for keeping secrets from Yukine.

"I won't tell anyone..."

A whisper like a gentle breath. The warmth of her breath was ticklish, wrapping him in a dreamlike mood. Before he knew it, as if placed under a suggestion of enchantment, he found himself blabbing about the circumstances since last night.

"Then... I will teach Kenshi."

"Is that okay? But Lady Maria might..."

"It’s fine. Lady Maria won't mind."

"Really?"

".....Surely... probably."

When he asked again just to be sure, Yukine thought for a moment and answered with a slightly toned-down voice. If Maria found out about this, she would likely just tease Lashara.

"I’ll keep it a secret."

Since they were two of a kind, he could assert that for a fact.

"This way. Sit anywhere..."

Yukine said that and laughed mischievously. She wasn't inflexible like Chiaia. She was a mature woman. Kenshi, left behind, stood there awkwardly.

"But it seems Lady Lashara is going to wear it, and I've never seen 'luxurious' innerwear before. When I asked the girls to show me what they had, I got slapped... hahahaha."

"In exchange..."

He had no choice but to laugh. The condition Yukine set was unexpected, but Kenshi readily agreed. He had no objection if it meant the two of them, Lashara and Maria, would get along better.

"So, what did you want to talk about?"

Since Yukine said she wanted to see what Kenshi had made, Kenshi had returned to the dorm once to retrieve it and placed it on the workbench. Yukine was checking it in detail with a serious expression, pulling at it and turning it inside out. The sight of Yukine looking at the sexy underwear was incredibly stimulating.

"You made this in one night?"

"Uh, yeah."

"The sewing is not a problem. No, it's perfect..." Yukine turned her pale face toward Kenshi and stared intently. "What's no good is the design."

And then, the bell signaling the end of the lecture rang.

".....When the noon work is over, come to the independent dormitory."

"Lady Maria's?"

Yukine nodded ever so slightly and left the repair room with the other technicians.

"Whoa, Lady Maria's dorm is amazing too..."

Being a dormitory for royalty and nobility, its facilities were the height of luxury. It was not at all inferior to the independent dormitory where Lashara stayed. Maria did not seem to have returned from her classes yet. The refinement of the room was apparent in the lace-patterned curtains and the table, making him feel somewhat restless.

After a while, Yukine returned with a steaming tea set.

".....Use this for reference."

After showing a gesture of hesitation for a moment, Yukine opened the closet door with force, as if she had made up her mind. Then she pulled out a storage box and pointed at the contents inside. Kenshi involuntarily exhaled and choked.

This was because colorful innerwear was neatly folded and lined up in great numbers. In terms of variety, there were bras, panties, petticoats, camisoles, girdles, stockings, corsets, and so on; in terms of design, everything was gathered, from mature styles to fancy ones and even body-shaping garments.

"Um, this is..."

"I've kept things I liked from around the time I started wearing them for reference... I'm happy if it's useful to Kenshi..."

Yukine said so shyly. Her white skin was dyed a peach color. However, Kenshi didn't know what to say—or rather, if it was okay to keep looking—and searched for words while becoming flustered.

"Is it not helpful?"

Yukine knit her brows sadly and looked away. "In that case, the ones I'm wearing now....."

Yukine grabbed the hem of her uniform and tentatively started to lift it, then hurriedly opened another drawer.

"Ah-wa-wa-wa, th-th-this is more than enough for reference!"

He said it almost as a shout, looking up at the ceiling so as not to let anything enter his field of vision.

"I see. That’s good..."

Yukine breathed a sigh of relief.

"I-is it really okay for me to borrow these?"

Kenshi lifted the bag. Inside, a large amount of Yukine’s innerwear had been stuffed in.

"It's embarrassing, but... if it's for Kenshi, it's okay."

Yukine said, looking away bashfully. Her exposed nape was dyed a faint cherry-blossom pink, and a fragrant sexiness wafted from her. Fearing he might start feeling strange if he stayed in the room any longer, Kenshi hurried out.

The next morning, before the start of the workday, Kenshi returned to Lashara’s independent dormitory. Lashara and Chiaia were in the study, just waiting for breakfast to be prepared. Wahanly had apparently headed to the workshop early and was not there.

Kenshi had just finished the production work in the repair room of the underground facility, having stayed up all night again. His consciousness felt like it might slip away if he relaxed. Going two days without sleep was not the problem; the cause was mental fatigue.

"Ho-ho. You have a look in your eyes that says you have some confidence."

"It's not exactly confidence, but..."

However, this time he had the reassuring reference material of Yukine’s innerwear. Kenshi was conscious of—

"How is it? I possess the allure of an adult woman, do I not?"

Lashara, who had rushed into the adjacent room, began stripping off her uniform without even bothering to close the door. Kenshi handed the creation wrapped in a paper bag to Lashara.

"Haa... you, your concentration and physical stamina are like a monster's."

The sleep-deprived Kenshi sat down on a nearby sofa for the time being. An unbearable drowsiness washed over him.

Chiaia was more impressed by that fact than by the quality of the finished innerwear.

"Let's see, ho..." "Lady La, Lady Lashara, this is bad!" "This is..."

Lashara and Chiaia let out voices of admiration. It was a four-piece set: a bra, panties, a garter belt, and stockings. However, the noise of their excitement startled him. It seemed his consciousness had drifted away for a split second. When he looked up, Lashara was standing tall before Kenshi. Still in her underwear.

"Is it good?"

The elaborate decorations were bold yet delicate; the complex and elegant lace patterns surpassed any of the innerwear borrowed from Yukine, reaching the level of a work of art. Instinctively, Kenshi backed away.

"But black is quite bold..." "But isn't black a little... a bit too early for Lady Lashara?" "Mu, I am not a child."

Lashara pouted defiantly, then turned around with an air of excitement.

"Wait here. I shall go change." "Eh? Lady Lashara, you'll be late!" "Then Chiaia shall help me change." " Kenshi, keep your eyes closed!"

The chasing Chiaia shouted at him.

"Eei, do not close your eyes! This is your work; considering future matters, you must verify it properly!"

While he was making the underwear, his head was full of technical details. But once it was draped over a human body, it took on an indescribable vividness. Kenshi closed and opened his eyes, not knowing what to do, wanting to run away.

Lashara wore a look of utter triumph as she sidled up to Kenshi. Her developing, immature body lacked the "adult charm" she claimed to have. However, for her, who considered being seen by others a matter of course, the behavior to attract people was second nature.

"Even if you say adult allure..."

While flustered by her fairy-like appearance, Kenshi spoke while averting his gaze.

"Fufu."

Seeing Kenshi's reaction, Lashara nevertheless nodded with satisfaction.

"Th-this is...!" "Lady Lashara, the meal is ready...!"

Maya, who had entered the study, widened her eyes upon seeing Lashara's figure.

"Oh, Maya... how is it going?" "For one who is the Princess-Imperial of the Shurifon Shtrayu Empire to be in such an unseemly state before a man, even if he is an attendant! If the previous generation knew, how they would lament! Even with Lady Chiaia present, what a disgrace...!" "S-sorry."

Maya glared at Chiaia and Kenshi, then grabbed Lashara's arm and dragged her back into the next room without further argument. However, Kenshi's brain wasn't functioning. As silence returned, the commotion before him felt like someone else's problem, and he just watched blankly. His consciousness faded even with his eyes open.

"Don't sleep!"

Chiaia smacked Kenshi's head.

"Kenshi is a party to this too."
"You’re being cruel..."

He had made it because he was told to make it, yet this was the treatment he received. It definitely wasn't worth it.

In the end, without resting at all, Kenshi left the independent dormitory with Lashara and Chiaia. On the way to the school building, Lashara rolled her neck as if loosening her stiff shoulders.

"Good grief, that Maya. Her lectures are a bit too long." "I think the one who makes her angry is the one at fault, though." "Did you say something?" "No, nothing."

Chiaia looked away toward the distance with an innocent face. Kenshi let out a wry smile and walked half a step behind Lashara. As long as he kept his body moving, he could escape the drowsiness.

"However, Kenshi, I have a new respect for you. That is a fine design. The comfort is also... it felt as if my body had become lighter. I even felt as if an extraordinary power was at work." "Thank you very much."

Kenshi hadn't expected to be evaluated that highly, so he sighed in relief, feeling satisfied. It seemed he might finally get some sleep tonight. But apparently, the effect was too great.

"Hmm... If that is the case, if things go well, I could make a small profit... no, a huge profit..."

While staring into space, Lashara began what seemed like a mental calculation of potential gains.

"Ah, I feel like she's thinking of something no good." "What a coincidence. I think so too."

Kenshi and Chiaia looked at each other. Both of their faces were twitching.

Kenshi stopped on the spot and did an about-face. It was better to disappear before getting dragged in.

"I didn't say that!"

Chiaia protested, but Lashara of course wasn't listening.

"I will give you the measurement data later, so make it by tomorrow. Understood?"

Lashara gave a strict order in a tone that allowed no refusal, then walked away without hearing Kenshi's reply.

"Kenshi, next is Chiaia's—" "W-wait, well then, I have work to do, so—" "Wait. Are you planning to run away?"

Chiaia grabbed Kenshi by the scruff of the neck and wouldn't let go. It was suffocating. While he was struggling, another hand reached for Kenshi's collar from a different direction.

"Make Chiaia's underwear." "Eh!" "Eh!?"

Kenshi slumped to the ground feebly.

"...Just when exactly will I be able to sleep?"

"Why does it turn out like this?" "The more experience points, the better. Besides, I must verify whether that sensation of fit was something only I felt."

Lashara curled the corner of her lips into a smirk.

"I can't make Chiaia's, it's embarrassing!" "What do you mean 'embarrassing'! Are you saying my body isn't feminine enough?"

Beside him, Chiaia voiced a misguided complaint to Kenshi.

"Then it is fine to make it, right? Chiaia."

In the early morning, while it was still dim outside, Chiaia's innerwear was also completed. It was a three-piece set consisting of a bra, a camisole, and panties. In Chiaia's case, he had modified her existing basic items.

"Welcome back~"

When he returned to the dormitory, Chiaia was just coming out into the garden. She was about to start her daily routine of sword practice.

"Kyaaaaa!"

Chiaia let out a piercing scream and attacked with the wooden sword she was holding. If his body hadn't moved unconsciously, he would have taken a direct hit. But thanks to that, his head cleared up a little.

"That's cruel, Chiaia~" "Don't approach me without a presence so suddenly!"

For a knight like Chiaia, being spoken to from behind without sensing a presence meant defeat—and in some cases, death.

"I made Chiaia's innerwear too~"

Kenshi held out a paper bag.

"Eh? You really made it? It was Lady Lashara who told you to make it by tomorrow, but... I suppose it can't be helped. Fine, I'll try it on after my practice is over."

Perhaps feeling sorry for Kenshi's haggard state, Chiaia didn't refuse him flatly.

"You should rest for a bit until Lady Lashara wakes up."

Kenshi lay down on the bed in his room for the first time in a while and fell asleep instantly.

Kenshi was only able to sleep for about an hour, but his head felt considerably clearer. Before breakfast, after Chiaia showered and washed off her sweat, she put on the innerwear Kenshi had made. Now, she was reporting the comfort to Kenshi and Lashara in the study.

"Heh, you made Chiaia's this time."

Wahanly, having overheard the conversation, came in.

"The chest is a bit tight... I guess. Everything else is no problem, though."

Chiaia placed her hands over her chest on top of her uniform, repeatedly pressing and releasing.

"That's strange. Chiaia's size is eighty-buheff!"

Before he could finish, Chiaia's fist sank into Kenshi's cheek.

"Then, could it be you got fa—haguh!"

This time it was the opposite cheek.

"When was it that you took measurements?" "Umm... oh? When was it, I wonder?"

Chiaia tilted her head, searching her memory.

"That's it! It was when we were making the clothes for the Title Bestowal Ceremony!"

Kenshi remembered the sight of Chiaia in a gown and leotard, the kind one would wear in a beauty pageant.

"Oh dear. My chest has gotten bigger again. It gets in the way when I swing my sword." "What do you think of that line?" Wahanly whispered to Lashara in a small voice. "It is a statement that would make enemies of a certain percentage of all women."

Lashara poked Chiaia's chest with her fingertip.

"Ahya! L-Lady Lashara!"

Lashara poked it repeatedly.

"Well, since Mexaia is even larger, you are still bound to grow more." "Please stop!"

She remembered Wahanly was there. With her cheeks dyed red, Chiaia held her chest with both arms and backed away to escape Lashara's fingertips.

"If it cannot be helped, we must measure the actual size."

If the measurement data was unreliable, then indeed, it was meaningless unless they actually measured it. But if that happened, would he be up all night again tonight? Kenshi's vision went dark.

"Alright, Kenshi, measure her later." "......Eeeeeeeehhh!!!" "......Eeeeeeeehhh!!!" The voices of Kenshi and Chiaia overlapped in perfect, shocked unison.

"I'll measure myself. So you, keep your eyes closed!" "Ugh....." "W-Why Kenshi?" "Because Kenshi is the one making them," Lashara pointed out. "Since we'll be taking orders from now on, you'll be the one measuring the other girls too. You might as well do a practice run now."

When Kenshi pointed this out, Chiaia was at a loss for words and groaned. The two fell into silence, and a strange tension swirled within the confined room. However, there

was no point in wasting any more time. Lashara grabbed the arms of Kenshi and Chiaia, who were both trying to back away, and forcibly shoved them into the room.

"I think... that's impossible. There are places you can't reach, and places that have to be measured while your limbs are extended." "I'm tired....." "Nonsense, it's just taking measurements. It'll be over in a flash." Lashara closed the door with a smirk. Naturally, it seemed neither Wahanly nor Lashara had any intention of helping, as they waited outside the room.

Kenshi and Chiaia looked at each other, both sharing an awkward smile. "......S-So, what are we doing?" "What do you mean 'what'... we have no choice but to do it." Chiaia seemed to understand well enough that once Lashara made up her mind, she wouldn't listen to reason.

".....The problem was only with the top, anyway," Kenshi said, taking out the measuring tape while averting his eyes from Chiaia. "Fine, I'm taking it off, but if you do anything weird, I'll kill you!" Turning bright red, Chiaia reached for her uniform.

Kenshi waited with his back turned to her. The sound of rustling clothes seemed unusually loud. When he turned around, Chiaia was flushed a peach color, not just in her face but across her entire body, as if she were slightly feverish. The light blue innerwear Kenshi had made emphasized her physical beauty.

"If you touch me anywhere unnecessary, you're dead. Got it?" Kenshi nodded instead of answering and extended the measuring tape. He emptied his mind, trying not to think about anything as he wrapped the tape around Chiaia from behind. Once the set of measurements was finished, Chiaia let out a breath of relief.

"Likewise." Having been handled with considerable care, Chiaia gave a shy smile. "Act this politely and like a gentleman with the other girls, too. Got it?"

The moment she said that, Kenshi felt his consciousness start to drift away due to the relief of finishing the task. The situation of being one-on-one with a female student, the confined room, the command "Got it?", the extreme sleep deprivation, his empty head, the intense tension, the fact that Chiaia and Mexiah were sisters... various factors combined.

".....Yes, Big Sis Mexiah."

Chiaia turned around and spoke to Kenshi. She peeked at his face as he looked down dubiously. Her eyes then widened in shock. "Huh? What are you saying? Big sister isn't here."

A hollow gaze and a lack of expression. The Kenshi who had once turned into a "massage machine" was standing there. Previously, under a suggestion planted by Mexiah, he had been driven to perform suspicious, borderline-outrageous erotic-style massages; Kenshi's current state was an exact replica of that time.

"Kyaaaa! You, what switch just flipped!?" As Chiaia backed away with a scuffle, Kenshi approached her soundlessly. "H-Hey! Come to your senses!" Chiaia threw a punch, but Kenshi dodged it effortlessly and grabbed her arm. "Kya! Where are you touch—"

Kenshi proceeded to pin Chiaia to the floor and began the massage. "An... stop... stop it..." Striking him didn't work, kicking him didn't work, and even her headbutts were easily evaded. "I said stop, ahhhhn!" Chiaia struggled desperately, but the more she squirmed, the more her weak points were attacked. "Th-That... place... ugh, ugh, Ken....." Chiaia desperately endured Kenshi's offensive.

"What's going on!?" Hearing the commotion, Lashara opened the door. Chiaia and Kenshi, who had been leaning against the door, both fell backward; by chance, it resulted in a position resembling a circle throw. *Thud!* Kenshi's head collided with Wahanly's with a dull sound. Both of them fell to the floor and lost consciousness.

The following evening—. It was a day off, and school was out. "So, how is it?" Lashara asked Chiaia for her thoughts. Half a day had passed since Chiaia had tried on the garment Kenshi had remade to her actual measurements. She was likely still wearing it now.

"It's aggravating, but the fit is very good," Chiaia said with a sullen expression. It was clearly against her better judgment to admit it. Kenshi seemed to be in a deep sleep for the first time in a while and had not woken up yet. "It's easy to move in because there's no unnecessary tightening." "I fancy your figure looks quite a bit better in it, too." "......Well, I do feel that....."

The level of perfection was extremely high. It appeared to have a body-shaping effect in a very natural way. It likely maximized the potential of the material. If word of mouth spread, people wanting to buy it would surely flood in.

"However, the problem is the measuring... to think he'd enter 'Berserker Mode'..." "Ugh!" Memories of the fear and pleasure resurfaced, and Chiaia clenched her fists, her shoulders trembling. If there was a possibility that the suggestion Mexiah had previously planted would trigger, they couldn't possibly let him do the measuring.

The original purpose of bringing Kenshi to the Holy Land as an attendant was to make it widely known that he was Lashara's property and to establish a fait accompli by continuing to employ him for a year. It would be very bad if Kenshi caused a scandal before that period ended.

"If we can't do the measuring... should we 'borrow' the Holy Land's data...?" "Wouldn't that be risky?" Normally, if an outsider used precise measurement data, a massive margin would be charged. Especially for items that touched the skin directly, like underwear, the specific body parts measured and the measurement methods themselves were classified; thus, they were almost never lent out. Even if they were, the important parts of the data would be omitted, leaving only basic information.

"If we use the Holy Land's data, we would naturally have to place the order with the Holy Land's workshop." "If that happens, in the end, all we'd get is Kenshi's part-time wages." That being the case, the only way forward was to deviate from the rules.

"Fortunately, these people are the ones with money. It might be better to be cautious and whet their appetite for it," Lashara chuckled deep in her throat. Chiaia watched Lashara with a cold, judgmental stare. "Using Kenshi to run that kind of business is a violation of the regulations to begin with... You should avoid doing anything that might tarnish your name, Lady Lashara..." "My reputation among the students will only go up, not down. The Holy Land might keep an eye on us, but it’s a bit late for that! Hahaha!" "Please don't just brazenly wear it out!" As Lashara laughed heartily, appearing unconcerned, Chiaia called her out while simultaneously giving up. Of course, Lashara just let it slide.

In a certain locker room: "Wow. What is that...?" One female student was drawing everyone's attention. The innerwear she wore was adorned with delicate lace patterns and even exuded a sense of elegance. It seemed excellent not only in design but also in functionality.

"Was she always that thin?" "I feel like her chest got bigger, too..." "I wonder if it's thanks to that innerwear." The female student was changing with an unbelievable level

of satisfaction. While pretending not to notice the reactions around her, she was casually removing her uniform in a way that made it easy for others to see.

"Rumor has it the texture is amazing. That's what Wahanly was saying." "I heard Mr. Kenshi made it." "Really? I want one made for me too." The surrounding female students whispered to each other, sounding excited.

"Then why don't you just have him make one?" Another female student chimed in from the side. She spoke with a strangely proud look on her face. "Haven't you heard the story that Lady Lashara is secretly taking orders? I've already signed up." "Eeeh!? No way, when did you do that!" "But why in such an inconspicuous way?" "While flashy innerwear is tolerated, it's technically a rule violation, right?" "Oh, I see..."

The Holy Land was, after all, a place of training. Regulations were originally placed even on innerwear that couldn't be seen from the outside. The important thing was not letting the school administration find out. "Since they can't do it on a large scale, I heard the waiting list is already huge." The female student who had joined in later shrugged her shoulders with a look of regret that oozed superiority. "No way....." "Well, if the opponent is Lady Lashara..." "Exactly. I'm sure there's a way." Depending on the negotiations, she might give them priority. After all, the person they were dealing with was that Lashara, who was famous for being a miser in the Shurifon Empire.

The existence of the innerwear Kenshi made spread in an instant among the students. And so, a quiet battle for the waiting list began. To avoid risks, Lashara decided to have the individuals themselves bring the measurement data—such as sizes and patterns held by the Holy Land—to her.

Data that could be easily borrowed. Data that could be predicted from underwear already ordered from the Holy Land. Combining those with other necessary data obtained under the guise of "re-measuring" or by bribing staff, they gathered what they needed. Of course, it was a rule violation, but in the heat of the moment, no one cared about that. The students provided the materials, such as thread and cloth. Furthermore, as the competition for the waiting list intensified, they shifted to a bidding system.

"Hehehe, making it an auction was the right choice." Prices skyrocketed in an instant, but even so, there was no end to those who wanted the innerwear Kenshi produced, and owning it even became a sort of status symbol.

"Hehehe, zero production costs, zero material costs. It’s pure profit! Ah-hahahaha!" Lashara’s loud laughter echoed through the room.

Hanna and Jozy were getting excited discussing which brand was which. "I heard it's like that, but no one can figure out who the designer is." "Heh. If even the laundry crew can’t tell, maybe it’s a private brand?"

Kenshi had grown accustomed to the work; his production speed continued to climb, and he was finally able to get sufficient sleep. He began to find enjoyment in obsessing over the various designs, and he poured even more ingenuity into the garments to improve their comfort. Since the end result earned him gratitude from the female students, he didn't feel too bad about it.

"Speaking of which, the Repair Department mentioned that their fabric consumption has gone up," Hanna remarked. "You don't think one of our own is making them, do you?" Jozy furrowed her brows suspiciously at Hanna’s comment. "Well, I certainly don't know anyone in the Repair Department with that kind of skill..."

It happened one day while Kenshi was chatting with Hanna and the others during lunch break. The trend of the ornate innerwear had finally become a topic of conversation among the Holy Land staff. "By the way, Kenshi, have you heard anything? Like Lady Lashara mentioning it?" Hanna turned the conversation toward him. "No, nothing. They don’t discuss those things with a guy like me." "That’s true enough." "Ahahaha." Kenshi played dumb with a straight face, but he couldn't shake a lingering sense of guilt. Hanna nodded with a warm smile. "It’s a drab uniform, after all. Competing over innerwear fashion has been a thing since forever."

Kenshi felt his smile twitch. He scrambled to maintain his expressionless mask. "But they say the brand is unknown. The design and tailoring are apparently on par with the top-tier products of famous brands." "I suppose we’re both in the same boat..." Chiaia looked exasperated. "It can't be helped. We’ll just have to source the materials through our own channels. It's better than getting caught by the Holy Land."

When they reported the situation during dinner at the dorm that night, a jubilant Lashara told him to work in the dormitory from now on without much second thought. She was likely making a killing. Wahanly, conversely, was busy requesting a new set of innerwear from Kenshi. Chiaia no longer bothered to intervene.

While Kenshi wondered if this was really okay, he continued to work diligently that night. However, the discovery came abruptly. They had stopped working in the repair room of the Holy Land’s underground facility and moved to the independent dormitory, but the cause was Lashara’s stinginess in procuring materials. Because she used materials with durability issues, a large number of the innerwear Kenshi produced ended up being sent to the Repair Department.

During the investigation for the repairs, it was finally discovered that the items were made using the exact same measurement data the Holy Land possessed. Furthermore, as a result of questioning the students on the Holy Land side, it was eventually revealed that Kenshi was the one making them.

It was quickly determined that these undergarments were not on the Holy Land's official production list. When this was reported to the Holy Land high officials, it was decided that regulations against "extravagant innerwear" would be enforced.

"And it isn't just a procedural issue. The Holy Land is, first and foremost, a place of training. For students to compete over the extravagance of their undergarments is out of the question. However, since we have received numerous petitions from the students who purchased them asking for leniency, we have decided to settle for a strict warning this time." Lashara had been summoned to the Academy Head’s office.

"Miss Lashara. Do you have anything to say?" "That Kenshi fellow... he has truly put me in a difficult spot..." "....." "Oho! How very generous of you. You truly are a great educator—" "You don't seriously think those excuses will work, do you, Miss Lashara?" The Academy Head wore a gentle smile. Everything had already been investigated; it was clear that no matter what she said, it wouldn't fly.

"My attendant simply made use of his own talents." "If only he hadn't used the fabric improperly and misappropriated the measurement data," the Head countered. "Urgh." "A Holy Land penalty would likely be 'nothing more than a scratch' to someone of your caliber, I suppose." "No, no, I am reflecting. I shall be careful from now on." "I certainly hope so. Oh, and then there's this."

The Academy Head handed a thick data book to Lashara. She took it curiously, and as she began to read, her face changed color. "Wh-! What is this exorbitant amount?!" It was a bill addressed to Lashara. "It is the total for the cost of the materials used—at retail price—plus the facility usage fees and the official purchase price for the misappropriated data." "B-But this leaves me with almost nothing!" Lashara raised her

voice in protest, but the Head simply stared her down in silence. Her eyes said that if she resisted any further, all the profits would be confiscated.

"Are we clear, Miss Lashara?" "......Understood." Lashara slumped her shoulders and gave a dejected reply. "Excellent." Seeing Lashara's state, the Academy Head nodded with satisfaction.

The news that Kenshi's innerwear production had been halted had already become a rumor among the students. Since the next class was a joint practical exercise for the lower-classmen, the locker room was crowded with many students.

"What a shame about Kenshi-chan's innerwear." "I managed to get mine! Look, look. The texture is so nice~. It feels like being hugged by Koro-chan~." "Kiii! How scandalous!" As one student proudly showed off her pink bra and panties, another bit her lip, unable to hide her frustration. She had finally won an auction, only for the illicit production to be discovered immediately after, resulting in a cancellation. While there was talk of producing them through official channels in the future, they would be plain designs in accordance with school regulations.

"Oh, it's Lady Lashara." "Lady Maria is here, too." When Lashara entered the locker room, followed shortly by Maria, the atmosphere shifted and a buzz went through the room. The two moved to the lockers reserved for royalty and nobility. Unlike the general lower-classmen, they had a spacious area secured for them. However, since there were no specific partitions, their changing was visible to the other students.

Lashara scowled deeply when she noticed Maria appearing behind her. Whether Maria noticed Lashara's inner thoughts or not, she opened her heavy wooden locker with a composed face. Lashara stood beside Maria and began by removing her tie.

"I heard you were given a strict warning for overworking Kenshi, Lashara Earth." "Hmph, it's just that their heads are as hard as rocks." They exchanged hollow words without meeting each other's eyes. Lashara felt the eyes of everyone around her as she reached for the hem of her uniform.

[*...Hehe, prepare to be amazed.*] Today, for this very occasion, she was wearing the exceptionally flamboyant innerwear she had Kenshi make. Lashara threw off her uniform, imagining the look of frustration on Maria's face. She checked Maria's appearance out of the corner of her eye.

"Oh?" "Wh-!" Lashara’s eyes went wide. Maria was also frozen in stunned silence. From the color to the design and even the intricate lace patterns, everything was identical. The only differences were the base color and the personal crest indicating the individual.

She immediately realized what had transpired. Kenshi and Yukine had plotted this. Of course, the official reason would be that it was a coincidence born from Kenshi learning lace-knitting from Yukine.

Lashara felt her face flush hot with anger. Maria gave a wry smile, as if to say "they got us." "My, Lady Lashara’s and Lady Maria’s innerwear are matching!" "They are cousins, after all. It’s so cute and wonderful." "They certainly are close." The voices around them likely held no malice, but for Lashara, it was beyond embarrassing. Even so, her pride wouldn't allow her to show it on her face. "Good grief....."

The quality of the innerwear was so magnificent that she even hesitated to show her dissatisfaction.

"Kenshi! You've really done it now!" When Kenshi returned to the dorm, he was greeted by Lashara suddenly shouting at him. However, realizing she wasn't as angry as her words suggested, he let out a sigh of relief.

"Yukine-san said she'd teach me how to knit if I made a set for Lady Maria, too." Chiaia and Wahanly were feigning ignorance with composed faces. They had probably been forced to listen to Lashara’s complaining until Kenshi got back.

"Then why is it the same as Maria’s!?" Lashara grabbed Kenshi’s collar and began shaking him back and forth violently. "B-But if I made them different, it would just cause another fight, wouldn't it!?" "That doesn't mean you make them exactly the same!" "The colors and the name crests are different." "Is this a ‘spot the difference' game!? Honestly, you understand nothing of a maiden's heart." "A maiden's heart...?" Kenshi felt that "a maiden's heart" in this case contained far too many impurities. Though, if "capricious" was the definition, then she was spot on.

"Enough! You get no dinner tonight!" "Lady Lashara, that won't work on Kenshi," Chiaia interjected from behind. "He can just find something to eat outside, you know." "Mmmmgh~~~! Then you are to make one more set of new innerwear throughout the night! This time, something..."

"If you're planning something, I won't forgive you!" "Again!?" Kenshi said discontentedly, though he didn't feel as much trouble making it as he had before. He realized that

Lashara simply wanted to settle things in her own way. "Quiet! Just go already!" "Ye—es." Listening to Lashara's roaring shout behind him, Kenshi breathed a sigh of relief, feeling as though he was finally being released from this commotion.

Interlude

A space existed deep underground, further below the Holy Land's subterranean facilities. To get there, one had to pass by the side of the massive barrier furnace. Because of this, those with low endurance against ahou could not even reach it. To these old men, it was a perfect playground—a secret base or a hideout.

Currently, in the center of the dim room, a hologram from a 3D projection monitor floated in the air. "Good grief, this boy doesn't understand a maiden's heart at all." The chubby old man performed the skillful feat of laughing vulgarly while acting indignant.

"Ho ho ho, you talk as if you understand it yourself." "Of course. There is no one who understands young maidens as well as I do." At the tall old man's retort, the chubby old man asserted himself with total confidence.

"I suppose even a lecherous heart can be singularly devoted," the white-haired old man said, looking cheerful and smiling. "Taming a daughter who is both intelligent and strong-willed is part of a man's worth. The boy is still green if he can't see the charm of that princess."

"I think it would be a problem for a boy of his age to understand that. If possible, I hope he never understands your bad taste for the rest of his life." "Nonsense! Then which one is your preference?" "Hmm? Let's see... with the condition that it's twenty years later... I suppose I like that guard mechanic's daughter. Being serious, clumsy, and unable to be honest—isn't that helplessness of hers just endearing?"

The tall old man switched the monitor to display a red-haired girl. "Kah-kah-kah! You can't talk about others with that taste for older women." "I quite like the Dark Elf princess myself." "You've always liked those 'older sister' types."

This time, a woman with dark skin was projected. Her pointed ears were the hallmark of a Dark Elf. "If only I could go back to that boy's age and have her embrace me." "Guh-ha-ha-ha! You haven't withered away yet either, have you!" The chubby old man laughed boisterously, slapping the white-haired old man on the back.

"Well, that too is a matter of a little more patience. Eventually, once the energy is filled, even that will come true." The tall old man looked away from the boy on the 3D projection monitor and checked the status of the device's energy charging. "The fun is just beginning."

Episode 3

The female student walked fearfully through the school building at night. She looked back behind her many times. Nothing was creepier than a deserted school building at night. The daytime bustle felt like a lie; it fell silent and showed a completely different face than usual.

"Why did I leave it behind...?" Even though she had been so careful, she would never normally forget *that* in the classroom. When the female student found the object of her search inside her desk, she let out a sigh of relief. "Found it!" What she held tightly to her chest was a diary. If it were a normal forgotten item, she could have just called a staff member and had them fetch it. However, she couldn't do that with a diary filled with private matters. The staff in the Holy Land, where the privileged class gathered, were highly educated and trained, and they would never steal a look at a student's diary—but there was still that one-in-a-million chance. Especially during this period when many new staff members were joining due to a shortage.

The silent classroom felt somewhat cold and distant; it wasn't a place she wanted to stay for long. The female student turned off the lights and immediately left the room. She walked down the empty hallway. She wondered if it was just her imagination that it felt longer than usual. Wanting to leave as quickly as possible, her pace naturally quickened.

—*Tap, tap, tap*—

At first, she thought it was an auditory hallucination. Gradually, the sound grew louder. No matter how much she tried, she wouldn't admit it. She intentionally tried not to think about it. Still, once it exceeded a certain limit, she was forced to become conscious of it. She caught her breath and stopped.

Tap, tap...

A few steps behind her, she felt that presence stop as well. In ghost stories, it was a rule that one must never look back. If you looked back, you would meet a terrible fate. That was the classic trope. So, on the verge of tears, she desperately started to run.

—Patter, patter, patter, patter!—

This time, it was blatant. The mysterious footsteps also began to run as if chasing her. As she reached a corner in the hallway, she acted not out of curiosity, but out of a defensive instinct to confirm her safety. She turned her head for a split second as she rounded the corner to scan the hallway she had just run through.

There was nothing there.

"Hah, hah, hah... Was it my imagination?" She stopped on the spot to catch her breath. She heard no footsteps following her. She felt no strange presence. She stood there listening for a while, but nothing changed. Her breathing calmed down, and her heartbeat returned to near normal. Finally, she relaxed. Then, laughter welled up inside her. The moment she was released from extreme terror, she couldn't help but laugh. "Ah... hahahaha."

Tap. "Hieeee!"

In an instant, her spine froze. Standing frozen at the corner, she saw something whitish swaying. She couldn't move a single step. At the ends of the corridors stretching in both directions, something was there. But the thing she was truly terrified of was that, despite having her back against the wall, she could hear footsteps coming from *behind* her.

That impossible presence caused her fear to mount to the absolute limit. She must not turn around. She had a premonition that if she turned around, she would be dragged into an unknown world. Her legs shook uncontrollably, and tears spilled out on their own. And yet, the moment something chillingly cold stroked from her nape to her cheek, she turned around reflexively.

Before her eyes was nothing but a wall. "Kyahaaaaaaaaaaaa!" The female student let out a piercing scream. Immediately after, as if a paralysis spell had been broken, her legs moved on their own. After that, she just ran for dear life. She dashed down the stairs near the corner as if tumbling down.

"Poor thing... tee-hee." A small female student spoke toward the ceiling. "Not a single look back, right?" From the room on the other side of the wall where the poor student had just had her back, a large female student—who had been floating near the ceiling

covered in a whitish cloth—descended. "Ufufu, a huge success. With this, the rumors will spread again this year." The two female students celebrated their success with a high-five. "Still, consulting Wahanly-san was the right move."

The large student had a small barrier furnace capable of aerial levitation, and the small student had a machine that vibrated the wall to generate sound at a desired location. "It generates energy from the temperature difference with the heat of the hand... was it effective?" The large student said while looking at the object she held, which was shaped like a pineapple grenade. It was an energy generation device applying the steam power that Wahanly was developing. "I think so... but it's difficult and I don't really understand it. Still, it's impressive that a machine can work even in the Academy, which is outside Ena's draft, even for a short time."

These two female students were executive committee members for the "Test of Courage" event hosted annually by the Student Council. They had set up these tricks beforehand to hype up the event. In fact, the recent incident was also a set-up. They had spotted the freshman girl putting her bag and diary inside, but the committee students had moved the diary from the bag back into the desk when she wasn't looking. Of course, they didn't do something like look at the contents of the diary.

"If it's her story, everyone will definitely believe it." They had specifically chosen a serious student who didn't usually tell jokes or lies. If she spoke of her experience, its credibility would be high. "Even so, she was really surprised, wasn't she?" The smaller female student was giggling, remembering how funny the freshman's fear had been. But the other larger student, perhaps noticing something, suddenly made a cramped face and stared at a single point.

"What's wrong? You have a scary look on your face." "T-That..." The large female student pointed behind them. "...Eh?"

Behind the petite female student who spun around, there was nothing but a wall.

"Haaa, so this season has come around again..." Megu let out a melancholy sigh.

"Well, summer just isn't exciting without this, right?" Acting as an indirect participant, Wahanly seemed to be enjoying herself. Because Kenshi did not understand the circumstances, he remained there with a puzzled look on his face. He was still concerned about whether it was truly alright to leave those screams alone.

"It’s fine, it’s fine. Look, no alarms are going off, right? It’s just the usual setup." "Setup?" "It's just a wall... wait, what!?" "Aaaah!" The petite student instinctively rubbed her eyes. For a split second, she felt as if the pattern on that wall had moved.

"Kyaaaa!" A woman’s scream, sounding like a death scream, echoed gloomily through the nighttime path to school. It was almost like a laugh.

Kenshi : "What was that!" Kenshi listened intently. He discerned the direction from the echo of the voice. He guessed it came from the lowerclassmen’s school building. The two girls acting as pranksters looked at each other and began to step backward. The school building was shrouded in silence, and not a single sound could be heard. There was no wind outside, and not even the rustling of the trees occurred.

"Isn't it Koro-chan? He gets into the school building sometimes, right?" "Y-yes. I'm sure that's it."

However, the moment they tried to run off, Chiaia, who had been walking with them, grabbed Kenshi's collar and pulled him back.

Kenshi : "Ow, that hurts, Chiaia—" The girls had completely forgotten the sense of superiority they felt while playing pranks; they, too, were now feeling the eeriness of the school building at night. Along with a sensation like cold air crawling up their spines, goosebumps began to break out all over their arms.

Chiaia: "A test of courage?" Chiaia shook her head with an exasperated look. Her hair, wet from the bath, looked quite alluring. The two female students were telling each other with their eyes that it was just their imagination.

The dry laughter... Kenshi and the others had been healing the day's fatigue in the large communal bath of the transport ship *Swan* and were on their way back to the independent dormitory. Instead of using the bath at the dorm, they occasionally used the *Swan's* large bath like this.

Apparently, in order to hype up this "Test of Courage" event, the Student Council would spread various ghost stories in advance to fan the students' fears. The words stuck in the back of their throats and wouldn't come out properly. And then, it happened just as they looked toward the wall again. The pattern on the wall swayed, and it took the shape of a human face.

"You can just leave it alone." Lashara said.Since Lashara seemed to have a slight cold, Maya had stopped her from walking out on the night roads; thus, it was unusually just the three of them: Kenshi, Chiaia, and Wahanly.

Kenshi still could not understand what Wahanly was saying. "It’s the annual Test of Courage organized by the Student Council." "I mean, the stage is the best. Schools are a treasure trove of ghost stories anyway, but the Holy Land's academy facilities have all sorts of histories behind them." "Histories?"

"Candidates for Seikishi gather here from all over the continent, right? Even if countries are at war, you aren't recognized as an official Seikishi unless you come here. If you aren't officially recognized..." "So?" "...you can't marry a Seikishi, and it can affect the number of Seikishin distributed to you." To the puzzled Kenshi, Chiaia let out a long sigh. "The squabbles between countries affect things here, too. Accidents, suicides... various things happen."

Having guessed what kind of things Wahanly did during the Test of Courage, Kenshi stopped asking further. "...I don't think it's possible, but Chiaia, are you scared?" He happened to look at Chiaia walking beside him; her expression remained clouded, and she had been constantly scanning her surroundings for a while now.

"T-that's not—" "Right—?" It seemed it was just Kenshi's imagination. Chiaia began to stride forward again with long steps. "Even if they act friendly on the surface, a fair number of girls have died here. This place was a 'demon's den' where suspicious research and whatnot were conducted even before it became the academy." Wahanly said this, yet she still seemed to be enjoying herself.

"Well, besides that, the freshmen aren't used to it. Some of them get genuinely scared and can't even go to the bathroom at night. I have no idea how this is supposed to be a 'welcome party'." "True, it does have a side to it where they strictly teach the pecking order to the cocky freshmen who've gotten used to academy life. I was specifically targeted, for instance." "Bad rumors about Wahanly did spread after the Test of Courage, didn't they?" "Hmm... Nyahaha."

"There's no way!" "Hey, what kind of things do you do in a Test of Courage?" While looking at the back of Chiaia walking ahead, Kenshi tried asking Wahanly. "Every year, the pattern is to form pairs, explore the depths of the underground facility, and come back. It'll probably be that again this year." "Pairs, huh. I guess that's the classic way."

When Wahanly spoke teasingly, Chiaia stopped and turned around. Her face, illuminated by the moonlight, was tinged a subtle red. "Hey, Chiaia—" "W-what are you

saying!?" With that, even the dim-witted Kenshi finally realized. "Ah, I see. Chiaia and Dag—" "Shut up!" Before Kenshi could finish, Chiaia's fist came flying. It seemed Chiaia harbored faint feelings for a male Seikishi and childhood friend named Dagmayer Mest. Dagmayer was also the son of Lord Babalun, who held the real power in the Shurifon Empire.

"Kenshi, you need to study the maiden's heart a little more." Since the partner was a male Seikishi, free romance was not permitted. It could be called a love that would never bear fruit. "Hehe—I'll just hug him!...or something like that."

"The pairs seem to be free this year too. Male-female pairs are fine, of course, but same-sex pairs are okay too, and the partner doesn't even have to be a student. It can be a teacher or staff. Popular people seem to be dragged into it multiple times. Professor Mexia is in high demand every year." "Heh—" It sounded like a rather interesting event. Then, Chiaia thrust her finger in front of Kenshi's nose and leaned her face in close.

"You're saying 'heh' like it's someone else's problem. You already stand out as Princess Lashara's attendant. With the massage business and that innerwear incident from before, applicants will undoubtedly swarm you." "Eh!?" He instinctively checked with Wahanly with a sidelong glance. "If you have someone in mind, you'd better apply early, or the Student Council will set you up with a killer schedule." Wahanly agreed with Chiaia.

"But you know, I still think they go too far." Chiaia's expression clouded again, and she scanned the surroundings gloomily. She trembled as a distant howl of a beast reached them. "Are you sure you aren't scared?" "I'm not!" Chiaia snapped back defensively. Since poking further seemed like it would lead to trouble, Kenshi said nothing more.

"Ever since Lady Lithia became Student Council President, things have become quite elaborate. Well, because of that, it's more exciting than before." "In the first place, researching what each student is afraid of in advance and using that to scare them is just bad taste. Last year, people were fainting one after another." "I heard they're researching effective ways to scare people by collecting old records and literature." "Whoa, they go that far...?" If it was the serious Lithia, she might indeed go that far. "If you're going to do it, do it thoroughly." Kenshi had lightheartedly thought he was uninvolved, but it seemed he wouldn't be able to just watch the fire from across the river.

"Well, because of that, it's a fact that many students are looking forward to it." "Lithia doesn't seem to think very highly of you. If you have something you're bad with, be prepared."

[*...I'm most scared of Chiaia, though*.] Apparently, his thoughts had shown on his face. Chiaia stood there trembling with her fists clenched, enduring her anger. Kenshi put some distance between himself and Chiaia, moving to the other side of Wahanly to use her as a shield. "So, Wahanly, who do you plan to go with?" "Last year I went with the old men from the workshop, but what should I do this year?" "Why don't you go with someone you like?" Chiaia said, as if in retaliation for earlier. "Hmm... I probably can't bring a Mechanic in with me this time..." "No... that's not what I meant." As Wahanly spoke seriously, Chiaia muttered in exasperation. "Of course."

Kenshi, having confirmed what Wahanly did last year, nodded with satisfaction. "Then Wahanly, why don't you go with me?"

"What? Have you finally noticed this big sister's charms?" Wahanly closed one eye in a mischievous expression and struck a curvy pose with her hands on her hips. "Haha." Kenshi let out a dry laugh. It was a phrase that felt too out of place coming from Wahanly. However, if not for her usual behavior, she was a beauty and quite glamorous.

"How rude. But well, I guess that’s easy enough. The workshop grandpas are begging me to give them a break this year... But do you have anyone like that, Kenshi?" "Me?" Was there anyone he specifically wanted to go with? Seeing the expression of Kenshi as he thought it over, Wahanly pressed in, looking delighted. "Oh ho? Do you have someone in mind?" "Uh..." Being suddenly interrogated by Wahanly, Kenshi became tongue-tied. Wahanly wore a suspicious grin. "Nyahahaha, it’s definitely Yukine-san, isn't it?" She pointed her finger sharply at Kenshi.

"N-no..." Kenshi thought. Among those he had met at the Holy Land, Yukine was a beauty with a particularly striking aura. Recalling a time in the past when he had failed and she had comforted him with such kindness, Kenshi's Kenshi face reflexively turned hot.

"Hmm, I see..." "Is that so—" Chiaia and Wahanly both wore wicked grins. Knowing from experience that women are troublesome in these moments, Kenshi hurried toward the dormitory as if fleeing.

"Ah, hey, Kenshi, wait!" Chiaia's voice echoed across the night path to school.

While that was happening, he arrived at the Independent Dormitory. He had gone to the trouble of washing away his sweat to feel refreshed, but now he had ended up working up a sweat again. At the entrance, Lashara met him with a sullen expression.

"Late." "Were you... waiting for me?" "Hmph, you seemed to be having quite a lot of fun excluding me. Even from in here, I could hear your voices—" "It wasn't like that!" Kenshi shook his head frantically as Lashara glared at him.

There was already a foundation of endless rumors, but the stories were now being told with various exaggerations, making them sound quite plausible. It was said that a monster lurked in the school building at night. It was said that the monster would creep up silently from behind and attack. It was said that once caught, one would be dragged into the ruins buried deep beneath the Holy Land. It was said that if taken to the old ruins, the victims—the stories were mostly about female students, as there were few males—would be... the rumors were endless, but those were the general points.

"We were talking about the test of courage." "Ho... that rumor, then." It seemed Lashara had heard of it as well. "Who are you going with, Lady Lashara?" "I will accompany her, of course," Chiaia said, raising her hand immediately when Kenshi asked, but Lashara shook her head. "Chiaia, surely there is someone else you wish to go with. Since I shall go with Kenshi, you should go with whomever you like." "Then Chiaia can go with Dag—" "I told you to be quiet!"

Before Wahanly could finish, a kick was delivered without a word of protest. Avoiding Chiaia's attack would have been easy, but the aftermath would have been even scarier. For the time being, Kenshi took Chiaia's kick while dampening its force. It was a major event hosted by the student council. It seemed things were going to get quite hectic.

As one could see, this year's rumors had a certain trend, with the keyword being "monster." Even the locations of sightings were distributed throughout the entire academy, not just in the junior school building where the executive committee had set things up.

"Wait, Kenshi-chan!" "Huff, huff, huff... which way did he go?" He was so fast that no matter how much they chased him, they would lose sight of him immediately. The two female students searched for the boy's Kenshi figure, looking all around. "That way!" "L-let's go. No matter what, we have to get Kenshi-chan to be with us..." There was a

sense of desperation in their eyes, almost resembling a grim determination. As the boy Kenshi ran past, two female students followed, out of breath. He was the one being chased, yet he was the "monster" being pursued.

"I wonder what is happening..." Ricchia, the student council president, looked down from the window of the student council room at the sight of the female students chasing Kenshi.

The setup the student council had arranged was supposed to be a ghost in a white dress, not a monster, but no one knew the cause of the change. Furthermore, she was bewildered by the rumors spreading more than expected. Since the Holy Land was originally a place developed atop ruins from before the Age of Great Cataclysm, it was a location with many ghost stories. However, the current situation—where the rumors were erupting following the student council's prank—was abnormal.

Ricchia herself felt that part of it was hard to swallow, but she forced herself to accept that it was likely something triggered by the student council's setup.

Thus, just before the test of courage tournament this year, the entire academy was wrapped in a strange atmosphere; some enjoyed the vibe, some were truly terrified, and others passed the time pretending to be indifferent. When the student council executive committee began accepting pair registrations, just as Wahanly had predicted, a flood of applicants rushed to Kenshi. After all, for a pair in this kind of test of courage, the general image was that a man provided a greater sense of security. Since primitive times, men, who often went out to hunt and encountered danger, tended to have a high tolerance for fear once encountered. For a test of courage tournament rumored to be scarier than usual, the male staff were extremely popular. Even the slender and quiet Ulyte was said to have had his schedule filled up early.

"Ho, ho, ho, ho."

Kenshi was running lightly along the school path. Since he had started working at this academy, how many times had he been chased like this? He had become so used to it recently that he could handle it with ease. However, for Aura, the situation was a bit different.

As Kenshi was avoiding the female students in the shadow of the school building, a nearby window opened and a voice called out to him. "It looks tough for you." "Ah, Lady Aura. Hello." It was Aura, a Dark Elf and the princess of the Shurifon Kingdom, who always looked out for Kenshi. "Though, it is no wonder you are being chased." Aura was a person of noble pride yet gentle character, and she knew very well how outstanding

Kenshi's survival abilities were. The female students likely sensed that as well. For Aura, who tended to be the one doing the protecting due to her abilities and nature, standing on the side being protected was a bit of a dream.

"I have a mind to participate once in a while myself..." Aura stared fixedly at Kenshi. If she were to become a participant, she would undoubtedly go to Kenshi first.

The moment Aura called out from the side, the female student shrieked again.

"Wha—!"

The student shoved Aura away with all her might, slammed into the wall, and began running blindly.

"Wh... What is with her...?" Aura muttered, pushing her upper body up and looking toward the student.

Kenshi stared intently at Aura's face. For a fleeting second, it had looked as if the face of an unfamiliar old man was superimposed over Aura's own. When Kenshi rubbed his eyes to check again, the old man's face had already vanished.

[...A mistake? No, that's not it.]

".....Hey, Kenshi... Is my face really that scary?"

Aura spoke with a bitter smile. Although her clothes belonged to an old man, she was currently wearing a special-makeup mask. Kenshi reached out and touched Aura's face. Surprised by the sudden contact, Aura let out a small cry and her cheeks flushed crimson.

"What are you doing all of a sudden...?"

Kenshi did not answer Aura's question and instead surveyed the surroundings.

[...I've thought it was strange for a while now... but there's none of that feeling similar to what Big Sis showed me before...]

The characteristic "cold-rise" phenomenon that occurred during natural supernatural manifestations was absent. If that were the case, then this was something being caused artificially.

"I think she was probably just surprised by Aura -sama’s face."

"Hm? Then what did you see? Besides this student, there’s only me and you, Kenshi."

"Hmm, how should I put it? The most appropriate word would be... a ghost? I guess."

"A ghost? Hahaha, now that’s funny."

Aura seemed to think it was a joke and laughed joyfully.

"Ahahaha."

Kenshi laughed along with her. He reached out a hand to Aura and helped her up.

"Haha, ow..."

Aura grimaced. It appeared she had sprained her ankle when she was shoved and fell. Kenshi knelt to check it.

"It’s nothing major."

"No, it's no good. It’s swollen, isn't it?"

"Ah, hey, Kenshi!"

Kenshi hoisted the still-unconscious female student onto one shoulder, then supported Aura by tucking her under his other arm. Cutting off Aura's protests that she was fine, he began walking toward the stairs while supporting her.

"We should head back up for now."

"Huhu, come to think of it, when I first met you, Kenshi, I was the one lending you a shoulder like this."

"That’s true. Though I don’t remember much of it myself."

That had happened after Kenshi had attacked Lashara, only to be captured in turn and confined in a birdcage-like prison. If Aura hadn’t saved him then, Kenshi would likely be dead by now, or at the very least, severely injured. And even after that, he likely would have died from the local endemic disease. The fact that Aura was the savior of Kenshi's life was no exaggeration whatsoever.

Recollection 3

On the night he attacked Lashara, Kenshi was not killed on the spot but was instead captured for a time. However, the people aboard this transport ship, the *Swan*, were all eccentric. One might even call them soft-hearted.

Naturally, he was interrogated to reveal his background, but Kenshi never opened his mouth except to give his name. Despite that, no violent hands were laid upon him. While they were a bit mean—such as locking him in a cage suspended from the *Swan's* outer hull—they treated his wounds properly and even provided meals. Beyond that, they went as far as washing his clothes and preparing winter gear for him.

They were a world apart from the masked men who had subjected Kenshi to Seikijin pilot training.

However, in the upper atmosphere where cold winds blasted, the chill bit deep into his flesh once late night fell. He grew lonely, wondering what would become of him. If he were abandoned by the masked men, how would he ever return to his original world?

"You're just a disposable pawn."

The words spoken by Chiaia, the captain of Lashara's personal guard, had been stuck in Kenshi's chest for some time. If that were true, what on earth should he do? Such thoughts raced through his mind in circles.

What are my brothers and sisters doing right now?

While thinking of such things, wrapped in a blanket and dozing off, he suddenly sensed a presence. Unnoticed, the lock on the cage door had been removed and the door stood open.

"Clumsy, aren't you, Kenshi?"

A voice called down from above. Looking up, he saw a girl sitting on the ceiling beam of the birdcage-like enclosure, her face half-hidden by long bangs.

"Doll?"

She was the girl who had undergone pilot training alongside Kenshi. Though it didn't show on his face, he felt a secret sense of relief that someone had come for him. He hadn't been abandoned after all.

"......Let’s go....."

Doll held out a hand to Kenshi. He hesitated for only a brief moment before neatly folding his blanket, exiting the cage, and leaving the *Swan* behind.

"Hmm, so they took the bait....."

Lashara muttered as her eyes tracked the black Seikijin moving through the forest below. It was faster than she had expected. The effect of intentionally hanging the birdcage-like cell in a position clearly visible from the outside had been outstanding.

"......Well now, I look forward to seeing what we've hooked."

Since the one who came to the rescue was that black Seikijin, there was no mistaking they were the same group that attacked last night. All that remained was to wait for them to reveal their true identity.

"Dark Elves of the Pilgrimage Route Guard... you have uninvited guests within your airspace....."

Standing up from her sofa without her long silver hair swaying in the slightest, Aura listened to the message sent via anonymous communication to the bridge of the guard ship. With the Princess-Sovereign of the Shtrayu Empire traveling the pilgrimage route, they had been on guard duty since the other day, and it seemed someone truly was spinning a conspiracy.

However, she first had to verify the truth of the information. If possible, she also wanted to identify the person who had sent the Intel. Aura boarded her Seikijin and took flight from the guard ship.

Kenshi was being handled at the mercy of others.

"Eh?"

The black Sacred Mech Warrior carrying Kenshi landed on the deck of a container ship disguised for cargo transport. Kenshi walked along, flanked by soldiers whose faces were covered. Inside a warehouse where the cargo was empty, a blue Sacred Mech Warrior and a masked man were waiting. About a dozen soldiers stood by.

"Ah! A transmission Ahou circle!"

"Haa, haa, haa..."

Kenshi's breathing was ragged. He felt sick. His body was sluggish and feverish. For some reason, his physical condition had suddenly deteriorated. He wondered if he had caught a cold from being exposed to the night wind in the cage for so long.

"What happened to the disposal of Lashara?"

The masked man had likely altered his voice. He asked in a muffled tone that sounded like it was echoing underwater.

"..."

Kenshi could not answer.

"You useless fool! Even for an inhabitant of another world, is this all you amount to? Search him!"

"Yes, sir!"

The waiting soldiers grabbed Kenshi by both arms and began searching his clothes. Something like a glowing crest was sewn into the inside of his collar. A soldier tore it off. Kenshi remembered that his clothes had been laundered while he was unconscious. It must have been planted then.

"Just as I thought..." the masked man muttered, as if he had expected it. "Hmm, it was discovered surprisingly quickly. However, with this, I've managed to read a certain amount of the truth."

Just as the man who appeared to be the ringleader said, if Kenshi was an inhabitant of another world, it would explain both the piloting ability of that white Sacred Mech Warrior and its extraordinary endurance.

"Hurry up, Chiaia."

Chiaia was pursuing the black Sacred Mech Warrior using Wahanly's machine. Now that the transmission ahou had been discovered, it would likely be impossible to probe the opponent's identity any further. If that were the case, all that remained was to recapture Kenshi. He wanted to get his hands on a precious inhabitant of another world at any cost.

"What did the Princess say to win you over? That she would grant any wish?"

The masked man slowly approached Kenshi and peered into his face. Kenshi shook his head in denial.

"Playing dumb, are we?"

"I haven't... said anything."

Truly, other than his name, Kenshi had told the masked man nothing. However, for the man, it didn't seem to matter whether he had spoken or not.

"Well, fine. In any case, you are going to die here."

"Eh?"

Kenshi doubted his ears.

"The promise? Oh, you mean that bit about returning you to your original world? Ridiculous. You are nothing more than a disposable pawn for the assassination of Lashara."

He remembered Chiaia saying the same thing.

"In the first place, there is no method in this world to send you back."

Those words crushed Kenshi. His vision went dark with despair.

".....You lied to me, didn't you?"

The only reason Kenshi had followed the masked man and his group was for that reason. Otherwise, he would never have had a hand in something like the assassination of Lashara. The masked man sent a signal to the soldiers without a word. The soldiers drew their swords.

"Haa... haa..."

His breathing was difficult. However, he immediately realized the masked man's true intentions. In other words, he had been called back not to be helped, but to be silenced.

"What about the promise?"

The presence of someone behind him reached him. He thought there was no way to return to his original world. However, for now, he could still move his body. There was nothing left to bind his actions. He aimed for the moment the masked man, who was muttering with an air of composure, slowly drew his sword. Kenshi drove a roundhouse kick into the masked man's solar plexus.

"Ugh!"

The masked man tumbled over in an unseemly heap.

"You!"

"Tei!"

Kenshi used the momentum of a soldier slashing at him from behind to throw the man forward.

"What are you doing! Capture him quickly!" the masked man shouted in a frenzy.

Taking that as a signal, the soldiers slashed at him all at once. Kenshi skillfully evaded them with swift movements, mercilessly driving kicks into his opponents' vital points to neutralize them. Since he was in poor physical condition, he couldn't afford to hold back. Kenshi's movements were completely different from the soldiers'. He didn't let them land a single scratch.

"Wh-What are you doing!"

The masked man continued to wail hysterically while sitting on the floor. Once Kenshi finished off his attackers one after another, he ran toward the door leading outside.

"Chase him! Follow him!" the masked man screamed, but there was not a single soldier left standing. Every one of them was unconscious on the floor.

When Kenshi reached the deck, he ran to the bow looking for a way to escape. However, on a container ship floating in mid-air, he couldn't even disembark. Even if he tried to jump off, the altitude was considerable, and it didn't seem likely he would survive.

The large warehouse door opened, and the blue Sacred Mech Warrior approached with heavy footsteps.

"You've forgotten the debt of being picked up and have dared to make me lose face."

It seemed the masked man was inside.

"Haa... haa..."

Kenshi looked up at the blue Sacred Mech Warrior, but his vision blurred. Along with dizziness, his consciousness became hazy. He was barely able to remain standing.

"You look like you're suffering... I see, the disease has manifested. Hahahahaha, ahahaha!"

Even though the man was right in front of him, Kenshi felt the masked man’s loud laughter was coming from very far away.

"Haa... haa... No choice."

He had no more options. He refused to be used by the masked man any longer. Kenshi made up his mind and ran toward the railing. Without hesitation, he leaped into the air from the edge of the container ship.

After flying away from the patrol ship and hiding to observe for a while, Aura found a suspicious container ship.

"Unidentified registry... just as the information said."

Even when queried against the database, no corresponding container ship existed in this airspace. She hesitated between forcing it to stop for questioning or watching a bit longer.

"...Hm?"

Aura noticed a human figure running on top of the container ship. She zoomed in on the figure on the main display. It was a boy who wasn't even very old yet. Chasing the boy, a blue Sacred Mech Warrior she had never seen before emerged from the warehouse onto the deck.

"In-fighting? What on earth is happening?"

It was irrational to use a Sacred Mech Warrior against a single child. The events unfolding before her were somewhat surreal, and Aura's thoughts couldn't quite keep

up. But while that was happening, the boy being pursued simply jumped off the container ship.

"Ah!"

The distance between Aura and the other party was gradually closing. At that altitude, it didn't seem likely he would survive. However, it didn't look like a suicide out of desperation either. Before she knew it, Aura had flown out from the forest where she was hiding and caught the falling boy with the left hand of her Sacred Mech Warrior. She kept her distance from the container ship while flying through the air.

"I saved him without thinking, but..."

The boy didn't move an inch; he was unconscious. Sensing bloodlust approaching from behind, Aura avoided a direct hit by a hair's breadth. Energy rounds approached one after another toward Aura's Sacred Mech Warrior.

"Who is that Sacred Mech Warrior?"

The blue Sacred Mech Warrior that had been attacking the boy earlier was now chasing Aura. It seemed safe to assume it was indeed internal strife. In any case, since she had saved the boy, she had to protect him and hear the circumstances. With things as they were, she couldn't counterattack, let alone build up speed. It was better to just put the boy in the cockpit. Aura looked at the unconscious boy.

However, the Ahou waves of a Sacred Mech Warrior were dangerous for an ordinary child. There was no time to hesitate. The blue Sacred Mech Warrior caught up and swung its sword wide, intending to cut down Kenshi along with Aura's machine.

"This is Bad!"

The moment Aura tried to take evasive action, an energy round flew from a blind spot toward the blue Sacred Mech Warrior. While the interrupted blue machine regained its footing, Aura pulled away as far as possible. Then, a familiar Sacred Mech Warrior flew toward her from the front. That red machine undoubtedly belonged to the Captain of the Royal Guard of the Shtrayu Empire, Lashara.

"Chiaia Flan!"

"I knew it! Aura Shurifon."

Something about that "I knew it" nagged at the corner of her mind.

"That child!" Chiaia was surprised to see the boy.

With that, Aura was certain. It seemed she could recognize this matter as trouble related to Shtrayu.

"Leave this to me!" Chiaia leveled her sword.

"Sorry."

Aura entrusted the situation to Chiaia and began flying toward the Swan, which should have been ahead. Later, Kenshi was protected by Aura and reached the Swan. It was at this time that he leaned on Aura's shoulder.

It seems there was some trouble between the Shurifon Kingdom and the Shtreyu Empire regarding which country would take custody of Kenshi.

"The fever seems to have broken," said the most mature and beautiful woman in the group as she pressed her forehead against Kenshi's to check his temperature. Kenshi sat up in bed and looked around at everyone.

"......T-Thank you....."

Indeed, his body, which had felt so ill and sluggish, was now light. His breathing had also become much easier. It had been discovered that Kenshi was infected with and suffering from Rhodesia-tre, an endemic disease of the Sea of Ena, but his face flushed as he realized his situation. His treatment was temporarily put on hold.

"So cu~te~"

Since Triam grass was said to be effective against the Rhodesia-tre toxin, Aura headed to the forest along the pilgrimage route to collect some, accompanied by Messiah, who had newly arrived from the Holy Land as a guard for the Swan.

"Even with the herbs, that's a remarkably fast recovery..."

The one who spoke was a woman he didn't recognize, but her straight silver hair and brown skin were striking. The oldest woman, whom he remembered was called Messiah, hugged Kenshi and rubbed her cheek against his.

"Eh... um..."

During the journey, Aura was attacked by a black Sacred Mechanoid, but she managed to successfully collect the Triam grass. He seemed to recall that while he was semi-conscious during the onset of the disease, she was the woman who had supported his shoulder and brought him to the Swan.

Meanwhile, the Swan was attacked again by a blue Sacred Mechanoid, but Chiaia and Wahanly held their ground with coordinated attacks until Aura and Messiah returned, finally managing to repel the enemy. Ultimately, they still had not grasped which organization that blue Sacred Mechanoid belonged to.

Afterward, the Triam grass seemed to take effect, and Kenshi narrowly escaped death. When he woke up, Lashara, Chiaia, and the others were watching over him.

"Honestly, causing all this trouble..." Chiaia let out a weary sigh.

"For now, we'll have you pay back this debt properly later."

"You really are something..." Chiaia retorted in exasperation at the words of the woman who looked like a mechanic wearing coveralls.

Judging from the situation, it seemed that after he had jumped from the container ship while being cornered by the masked man, the people here had saved him and even treated his illness. For the first time since coming to this world, he truly felt the kindness of others.

"Look, he's still recovering..." Chiaia pulled Messiah away. "You should get some more sleep, too." Saying this, Chiaia dragged Messiah along as they left the room.

"We shall take a bit of a rest as well," Lashara said as she turned off the lights in the room. They must have been nursing him through the night. Taking that as a cue, the other women left the room one after another.

Left alone, Kenshi got out of bed and stepped onto the balcony of the guest room. The morning sun shone in, and he narrowed his eyes at the brightness.

"Oh, you're awake." Lashara spoke with a sigh of relief.

Below his eyes, a forest stretched out, and in the distance, green mountains, blue sky, and white clouds drew a sharp contrast. It was the first time since arriving in this world that he had paused to look at the scenery like this.

"......It's beautiful." The landscape illuminated by the morning sun as viewed from the Swan was beautiful beyond words.

"Kyaaaaaaa!"

By now, the female student's heart was dominated solely by the terror of being attacked by a swarm of insects. Occasionally, a male student's scream mixed in, but those belonged strictly to the ordinary boys who had entered the lower academy; there were no screams from the male Seikishi.

This was a courtesy to prevent the male Seikishi from being shamed; they had been told the locations and types of scares beforehand to ensure they weren't injured by unexpected trouble. However, the male students paired with multiple female students were acting as escorts—essentially guides on the side of the pranksters.

Kenshi ran through the long-disused facility while carrying the female student.

"There’s nothing there anymore! Please calm down!"

Even as Kenshi shouted, the female student swung her hands desperately as if brushing something away. Her hands struck Kenshi's face wildly and scratched him. Even Kenshi found himself at a loss.

Most of the "test of courage" involved simply walking through dark, ruin-like facilities with almost no actual mechanical scares. However, the female students, who had been thoroughly implanted with fear through prior information manipulation, were driven to terror by the slightest triggers.

Kenshi had first sensed something was wrong with the test of courage when he paired up with this student. In her case, the trigger was the faint sound of hated insects crawling, heard from the darkness. Furthermore, the sound seemed to come from all

directions in great volume. After that, if something were to simply drop onto her head, her endurance and reason would collapse in an instant.

An old man who looked exactly like her grandfather appeared in the dim corridors to preach to her.

"Look, that’s just someone from the student council disguised with special makeup."

Even when Kenshi pointed this out calmly, logic no longer applied to her. A terrifying experience imprinted in early childhood is not easily wiped away. That grandfather had reportedly died of a heart attack while scolding her; thus, the very existence of her grandfather had become the embodiment of fear.

"Is that true?"

Suddenly, the student's entire weight pressed down on Kenshi's neck. The screams that had been continuous no longer leaked from her lips. It appeared she had fainted. Holding the girl, Kenshi called out to the "old man" whispering further down the passage.

"Aura -sama—! You went too far after all—!"

The old man approached them and removed the special-makeup mask. Aura, with her stunning silver hair tied up, spoke with a bitter smile.

"Hmm. There are many weak students among this year's freshmen....."

"I don't like this anymore....."

The freshman girl clung to the scruff of Kenshi's neck, weeping and pouting.

"Grandfather, please forgive me. Please forgive me."

She continued to apologize desperately. Apparently, she had been raised by a strict grandfather in place of her busy parents. Kenshi suspected it was because they had stirred her up with too many eerie rumors beforehand, but she was already the fourth fainted student he had carried.

In the first place, very few freshmen had even reached the underground facility. Every student had either turned back screaming or fainted.

"Haha, I won't deny it. But if they face this, they will become serious in their future training."

"I knew it....."

Kenshi stared at Aura, who spoke so shamelessly, with a look of suspicion. *She's probably just enjoying herself...*

With a wry smile, Kenshi gave the poor student a physical jolt to wake her.

"Ugh... nnn....."

The student opened her eyes. She didn't seem to understand the situation, but when Kenshi peered into her face, her expression softened with relief.

"You seem okay now."

"Kyaa!"

She looked at Aura's face and fainted once more.

"Who are you going with, Lady Aura?" "Me? I am helping Ricchia. I will be playing a role in scaring people behind the scenes." It seemed Aura was an executive committee member of the student council. "I am truly sorry. But the rumors have spread more than in usual years, and we are bewildered ourselves." "Is that so?" To Kenshi, for whom this was the first experience with a test of courage, the words didn't quite click. "The atmosphere in the school is heavy... to tell the truth, I feel as though something other than the student council is in motion..." "Hmm, I don't think it's changed that much." Even inside the school, he hadn't felt anything in particular. Though, perhaps that was simply because he was Kenshi. "I see, then that is fine. Forgive me for saying something strange." Aura smiled brightly.

"Ah, there he is! Kenshi-chan, over there!" High-pitched voices echoed. Using that voice as a signal, several female students gathered. It was time to move locations again. "Sorry for stopping you." "Well then, Lady Aura. Good luck with your work—" Waving to Aura, Kenshi started running again to escape the female students.

In the end, because the female students had argued so much among themselves, the pairing with Kenshi was decided by lottery due to the large number of applicants. All of

Kenshi's time on the day of the test of courage was packed tight by the student council, without a single gap, much like the schedule of a popular celebrity.

The test of courage tournament was approaching the day after tomorrow. Chiaia looked up at the night sky from the window of the Independent Dormitory. It was dull and cloudy, and not a single star could be seen.

However, Chiaia still had not decided who she would go around with. To be honest, she wanted to go with her childhood friend, Dagmayer. But the relationship between the two was delicate. Even though they had been so close when they were young, at some point, a gap had formed between them. She thought there were many reasons for that.

First, there was the difference in status: he was the son of Lord Babalun, and Chiaia was Lashara's attendant. For now, Lashara and Lord Babalun had not clashed openly, but it was only a matter of time. Most likely, when Lashara graduated from the Holy Land Academy and returned to her country, the conflict would reach its conclusion. She was prepared for the fact that, in the worst-case scenario, she would fight against Dagmayer as Lashara's guard pilot.

But the decisive factor was that Dagmaya was a male Seikishi [Sacred Mechanoid Master]. The few male Seikishi were precious existences intended to father the next generation of Seikishi. They had neither the freedom of romance nor the freedom of marriage. If there was to be a point of contact between Chiaia and Dagmayer, both being Seikishi, it would be solely for the purpose of a marriage to produce the next generation. That rule had weakened the mental bond between the two—or rather, for Chiaia—and had robbed her of her proactiveness.

Among Seikishi, there were those who continued to nurture their feelings and became a couple after the male Seikishi grew old and retired. But that required strong feelings and patience. The lukewarm environment of being childhood friends, where being together was taken for granted and required no resolve, might have also been a misfortune for Chiaia.

Chiaia had also recently begun to realize that Dagmayer disliked strong women. The common sense in the world of Seikishi—where men are protected—was reversed in the world of ordinary people. While the Seikishi who took to the battlefield were women, the ordinary soldiers were mostly men. Because Dagmayer was a precious male Seikishi, he was not given a place to demonstrate his abilities. He was always excessively protected to ensure he was never injured. No matter how excellent he might be, there

was no place to show it. And as both a Seikishi and a warrior, Chiaia was more excellent than Dagmayer.

Perhaps it would have been better if she had acted more cleverly, if she could have played the role of a "cute" woman. But the clumsy Chiaia knew no other way than to collide head-on, and her feeling that she had to be strong as Lashara's guard pilot, combined with her excessive talent as a warrior, created an even greater gap in strength between her and Dagmayer.

Chiaia had imagined to some extent that Dagmayer likely harbored a complex regarding her. But for Dagmayer, it was something beyond what Chiaia had anticipated.

—It is meaningless to have romantic feelings for a male Seikishi. —Our positions are different, so it cannot be helped.

Recently, while telling herself such things, Chiaia had even begun to lose confidence in her own feelings of love.

The courage-test event proceeded smoothly. In the end, only a handful of first-year students were able to reach the point designated by the executive committee and return safely. As for the upperclassmen, most of them returned with composed expressions, seemingly having fully enjoyed the event.

"What, you ask what I fear?"

As expected, Lashara was stout-hearted. She had overcome several obstacles and had nearly reached the goal.

"There is nothing that I fear—" Lashara's words cut off there. She thought for a moment and then spoke again.

".....I suppose if I had to name something, it is terrifying to see a beautiful golden mountain crumble."

"......Huh?" For a moment, Kenshi didn't understand the meaning of her words and stared intently at her face. After thinking for a bit, he tried to confirm the meaning he had parsed. "In other words... you mean that seeing a beautiful mountain collapse is the most terrifying thing?"

"Exactly! The savings I've accumulated decreasing... that is what is terrifying..."

As he tried to move on, leaving Lashara to wallow in her own thoughts, a faint sound was heard.

Clink!

At the sound of a piteous cry, he looked over to see Lashara turning pale and trembling.

"W-What's wrong?" "I-I dropped my money!" "You brought money with you? Eeh!?" "No, no... I didn't bring it... but I dropped it!"

For a second he thought she was joking, but Lashara's expression was deadly serious.

"I won't have it! If it's dropped here, it's the end, I'll never find it!"

Clink, clink! The faint sound echoed again.

"It fell! It has fallen! It's deep... I cannot reach it."

Lashara's tone was like that of a small child. It seemed some kind of trauma had resurfaced. Piecing the information together, it appeared she had once suffered greatly because she dropped some money and couldn't retrieve it.

[...Is this related to Lady Lashara's mother? I heard she was an incredible miser... I mean, someone very particular about money...]

Kenshi, who knew many similar people, looked at Lashara with sympathetic eyes.

"I won't have it! I don't want to be here anymore! I'm going back... I'm going back!" Lashara suddenly dashed off into the darkness.

"Lady Lashara!" Just as Kenshi tried to chase after her—

Thud!

A loud sound echoed in the darkness. It was the sound of Lashara slamming into a wall.

Aura remained seated in the reception chair, rubbing her shoulder to relieve fatigue. Her ankle sprain seemed to be minor and had not turned into anything serious.

"Well then, everyone, please go and enjoy yourselves." Lithia gave a meaningful smile toward Chiaia and the others as she opened the door to the underground facility.

Only ten pairs remained, including the pair consisting of Kenshi and Chiaia. In the hall ahead, there were twenty doors, and a staff member in charge of each pair stood before a door holding a torch.

As the sun began to set, the school building started to dissolve into the darkness. Before anyone noticed, a cold rain had begun to fall outside, and the temperature had dropped significantly for this season. The students who had finished the courage test had moved to the upperclassmen's building and were indulging in the festivities of the welcome party. Unlike the lonely atmosphere of the lowerclassmen's building where presence had vanished, the upperclassmen's building visible across the windows was brightly lit and full of life.

"Alright, let's go!"

Chiaia walked toward the reception with heavy, snorting strides. Kenshi hurriedly followed her.

"What's wrong? You're strangely fired up." "Just come on! We're going to finish this quickly and get back quickly!"

Chiaia kept her eyes fixed forward, staring intensely at the door.

"Finally, the last ones."

The door where their assigned staff member waited was one they were passing through for the first time today. Perhaps noticing Kenshi's tension, the door swung wide open at the staff's signal, and the darkness welcomed Kenshi and Chiaia. Chiaia gulped with a serious expression.

Perhaps because she considered herself older than Kenshi, Chiaia began to lead the way by half a step. Shining a handheld light at their feet, Kenshi and Chiaia proceeded cautiously. Even though it was a new route, the atmosphere hadn't changed. The interior wasn't crumbling, nor were scattered furniture or luggage left abandoned. While there were some sets and props to build the atmosphere, they weren't the type to obstruct their passage.

"That's why I said this is my first time participating in the courage test; I was always behind the scenes."

So far, the executive committee hadn't triggered anything. However, there was no doubt that the actors, who had taken a different route to get ahead, were waiting eagerly while monitoring the situation of Kenshi and Chiaia. Chiaia remained silent, continuing to radiate a tense aura. He wondered if she could last like this until the end.

"Come to think of it, Chiaia, who did you go with last year?" Kenshi tried to start a conversation to ease her tension. "With no one."

With only that short reply, Chiaia refused to break her concentration.

"Oh, I see. Then, what about the year before last?" "The year before that, too."

Again, only a short answer came back.

"Um..." "It's my first time." "Eh?" Kenshi asked back.

"I was chosen as Lady Lashara's guard pilot, so I didn't do it."

The lowerclassmen's course at the Holy Land Academy was originally four years, and Chiaia was an upperclassman starting this year. The fact that she didn't participate the year before last meant she hadn't participated even once.

"The year before last... we were in mourning for the passing of the previous Shtreyu Emperor, so we didn't have to participate in these kinds of events." "I see... and last year?" "I-It doesn't matter why. I just wasn't very interested." "Really~?" An inadvertently suspicious voice escaped him. "It's true! What else would it be!?" Chiaia turned on Kenshi with unnecessary intensity.

".....Are you scared?"

The moment he said it, Chiaia's fist connected with Kenshi's jaw.

"Who said they were scared!?"

Pride and embarrassment seemed to have won out for Chiaia. [.....It’s Chiaia.] "Hey, aren't you going to say something?" Kenshi kept the remark about her bluntness to himself. He wondered how many times this pattern had repeated. He thought she might have learned by now, but since this airheaded streak was inherited from her father, it

couldn't be helped. Just as Chiaia was about to complain, she realized she was clinging to Kenshi with her whole body. "Kya! Noooo!"

The movement through the thin walls had been smooth so far, but the exchange seemed to have loosened Chiaia's tension, which was a relief. They had traveled quite a distance, yet there was a disappointing lack of anything happening. Just as he thought something ought to appear soon, they reached a place resembling a small room. Chiaia immediately shoved Kenshi away. "Hey, weren't you the one hugging me, Chiaia?" Ignoring his words, Chiaia began stomping toward the back.

Rather than fear, it was anger that drove her, but suddenly a massive vibration shook the space. "Kyaaaaaaaaa!" Chiaia began screaming instantly, her shriek startling Kenshi more than the tremor did. The entire small room shook violently. However, after advancing only a little further, Chiaia froze in her tracks.

Kenshi had sensed the presence of the executive committee members beyond the thin wall and assumed there would be some kind of "action." It seemed Lithia and Aura had gone out of their way to set up a gimmick solely to scare Chiaia. The shaking subsided quickly. "W-what was that...?" Chiaia murmured in a tearful voice. "What's wrong?" As Kenshi checked on her, Chiaia clung to him once again.

Immediately after, a different vibration—distinct from the previous one—transmitted through the floor. The shaking wasn't large, but it was a long, deep vibration that resonated in the pit of one's stomach. "N-no..." Chiaia, are you shaking?" Chiaia pressed her face against his chest, her body trembling uncontrollably. "It's okay. The shaking has already stopped." "R-really?" Chiaia looked up at Kenshi with teary eyes. She looked as helpless as a young child. Kenshi hadn't imagined the usual Chiaia would make such an expression, and he felt strangely flustered.

Her body was still trembling. To reassure her, Kenshi gently pulled her into an embrace. He lightly stroked her head and back to calm her down. This time, Chiaia didn't try to push him away. They remained in that position for a while. Perhaps five minutes passed. Their breathing synchronized, sounding unusually loud in the silence. Then, Chiaia began to giggle against his chest. Taking a deep breath, she finally looked up. Her cheeks were flushed red. "...I'm okay now." With a rare, bashful expression, Chiaia softly stepped away from him.

Kenshi felt embarrassed as well and couldn't find the right words. Afterward, they were both strangely awkward, but the atmosphere wasn't bad. They were nearing the

destination set by the committee. Once they collected the card that served as proof, they would return to the starting door.

"But why are you so afraid of earthquakes?" "It’s only natural for the ground shaking to be scary, isn't it!" "But even the *Swan* shakes." "The *Swan* floats! It’s supposed to shake! Besides, I'm like this because of a prank my sister played when I was little..." She likely had very unpleasant memories. Kenshi could easily picture Mesia gleefully "adoring" Chiaia. "I see. Childhood experiences can really become traumas." "You understand?" Chiaia asked with sudden intensity, as if she hadn't expected him to sympathize. "I understand very well. My foster sisters too..."

"But that earthquake was a bit strange." Kenshi tilted his head. "Strange? How?" "I think the first one was set up by the committee, but the small ones after that felt unnatural. Usually, earthquakes have a certain regularity, but those felt more like something massive was moving..." "What kind of 'massive thing' would be in a basement like this?" "I don't know... but according to Lady Aura, there are ruins from before the Great Collapse down here."

Kenshi looked away from Chiaia. The supple, soft sensation of her pressed against his elbow with every deep breath was becoming impossible to ignore. While they spoke, they finally reached their destination. They collected the card. Now, all that was left was to go back.

"...Still, this underground facility definitely has an atmosphere like something might appear." Having collected the card, Chiaia seemed a bit calmer as she shone her flashlight on the crumbling ceiling and dust-covered floor. This place had apparently been expanded many times since ancient times, and this section had been abandoned long ago. "By 'something'... do you mean ghosts?" Chiaia nodded timidly at Kenshi's words. "You're so strong, Chiaia, why are you afraid of ghosts?" "I can deal with any physical enemy, but you can't do that with ghosts." Kenshi smiled wryly, finding the answer very much like her. "Anyway, aren't you scared?" "Yeah, I guess." Kenshi nodded slightly. He couldn't exactly tell her that one of his sisters summoned and commanded spirits and monsters. "It looked like one tried to possess Lady Aura earlier and failed... but possessing someone with a different astral form is impossible, so it should be fine..."

Chiaia froze with her mouth agape at his explanation. "Was the earthquake earlier related to that? Wait... Chiaia?" "But seeing as there was no drop in temperature characteristic of natural occurrences, maybe someone is doing it intentionally...? This place has some pretty strange technology... maybe—" Chiaia was covering her ears

and shivering violently. Her eyes were teary, but this time she was glaring at him. "You..." "Me?" "You idiot! If there's something like that, tell me sooner! If we stay here, we'll be cursed! It's your fault! What are you going to do about it? Ugh, we have to run!"

"Ah—Chiaia, calm down." "How can I be calm? It's a ghost! There's a ghost here, right?" "It's not like they're going to do anything bad. At most, they just read people's memories. And even if you focused a massive amount of energy to artificially manifest an astral body, it could only scare people a little. Look, there's one over there, but it's not scary." Where Kenshi pointed, the faint, shimmering figure of a plump old man appeared. For some reason, his expression looked resentful... or rather, envious.

"Ugh... it appeared." Ignoring his relaxed words, the astral body drifted toward Chiaia. "Eek! Don't come here! Hey, if you're going to eat someone, eat Kenshi! I don't taste good!" While it was trivial to Kenshi, it was terrifying enough to cause a panic for Chiaia. She was saying some rather cruel things in her fright.

Then, the ground shook again. "Kyaaaaa! You said it wouldn't shake anymore!" "I said it was okay, I didn't say it wouldn't shake." Chiaia truly seemed terrified of the tremors; forgetting the ghost, she trembled while holding back tears. Now, a tall old man and a white-haired old man had joined them. There appeared to be a connection between the shaking and the astral bodies. Meanwhile, the plump old man had vanished. Suddenly, Chiaia looked at Kenshi's face and turned pale. She repeatedly opened and closed her mouth, unable to form words. "What's wrong?" The moment he asked, Chiaia's scream echoed through the halls.

"Noooooooo! Don't come near me! Die! Die! Die!" Chiaia began thrashing wildly in his arms. Even he couldn't dodge every punch and kick delivered at zero range. However, he hesitated to let the panicked Chiaia go. "That hurts! Chiaia, calm down!" He pulled her close, pinning her arms to his chest to restrain her. At that moment, he took a headbutt from her directly as a counter-move. "Gah!" The impact to his forehead made him see stars; he nearly lost consciousness.

"Guh... what a terrifying young lady," a voice echoed. Just as the consciousness of an old man seemed to flow into his head, he saw something fly out of his own body. The shimmering mist momentarily took the form of the plump old man before vanishing instantly. "See? I told you it was okay."

"Huh? Kenshi, right? Wh-what was that just now...?"

"They probably tried to synchronize with me." Kenshi explained that if the forms of Astrals were not about 80% identical, it was impossible to exert enough influence to

manipulate another person. In reality, it was a miracle for anyone to possess Astrals that were even 20% similar. Furthermore, Astral synchronization was originally intended for reading records stored within the Astral Sea. This time, the intruders had read Kenshi's memory of the pain from being punched by Chiaia, and they had jumped out in surprise.

"I don't know who you are, but isn't this prank going a bit too far?" Kenshi spoke toward the remaining two old men. "Astral synchronization isn't a one-way street from your side; it means I can see you from this side, too. You grandpas are Holy Mechanists from the other world, aren't you?"

"Wh-what did he say?!" "D-dammit!"

The two old men melted into the darkness as if fleeing.

"W-where are they going?" "Ghost hunting." "Good grief..." "Wh-what do you mean?"

Chiaia peered around the area, unable to understand the situation. "Let's go, Chiaia." Kenshi gave a small smile and pulled her hand.

Riding a floating plate that held several people, Kenshi and Chiaia descended down a long vertical shaft.

"In other words, those grandpas tried to copy my Astral to peek at my memories." Kenshi explained that the location used for the test of courage had been set with a barrier that copied Astrals. However, to completely copy a human's Astral—even using all the large-scale barrier reactors in the Holy Land—would take over several hundred years.

Chiaia puffed out her cheeks in dissatisfaction. "So they just copied a tiny portion and tried to read the most impressionable parts." "...I don't get it at all."

"Hmm. To put it bluntly, should I just say they were trying to peep?" "Peeping?!" "Haha."

"I could only read a tiny portion from their side, too... well, I guess it was just a way to kill time? Ahaha." "It's not a laughing matter! I was really scared!... Those geezers..."

Chiaia trembled, her fists tightly clenched. "Don't do anything too reckless, Chiaia." Kenshi, who knew the power of those fists all too well, desperately tried to soothe her.

Just then, a familiar unpleasant sensation washed over them. "Is this... Aho-sickness?" "Ugh, yeah..."

The vibration waves emitted from the large-scale barrier reactor were growing stronger, and the Aho-sickness had begun. It was incomparably more intense than the small-scale reactors installed in the Seikijin. Even so, Chiaia endured it, teeth gritted while breaking into a greasy sweat. She was likely still very furious. While Kenshi wasn't struggling as much as Chiaia, he also felt quite unwell.

"Is it... is it really just ahead?" "Yeah."

Come to think of it, Kenshi had heard from Hannah before that there had been talk of an energy leak from the large-scale reactor. That was likely the cause of this vibration. If a device capable of materializing three Astral Bodies at once were activated, it wouldn't be strange for such things to happen.

By the time the discomfort from the barrier reactor weakened, they reached the end of the shaft. Kenshi opened the thick door in front of him and walked a short distance down the hallway to find a large dome-shaped space filled with various equipment, books, and toy-like objects. It looked exactly like a hobbyist's room.

"There they are!" Chiaia suddenly shouted. Beyond her gaze, those three old men were hiding behind a sofa, trembling.

"Why would you do something like this?" Kenshi asked the old men while holding the struggling Chiaia in a restraint. "Let go! Let me go, Kenshi!"

"We're sorry, but after retiring, it's very boring... occasionally gathering like this to cause a ruckus is our only pleasure." A tall old man and a chubby old man bowed their heads one after another. The white-haired old man nodded as well.

"It's a nuisance!" "Now, don't say that. Our granddaughters and great-granddaughters are at this academy, too... we're just concerned about their futures."

"That's definitely a lie! You lecherous geezers!" "Now that we've retired, we don't have that kind of lust left in us, heeheehee."

However, their eyes—looking lewdly at Chiaia's chest, which was emphasized by Kenshi's restraint—lacked any conviction.

"But we wanted to experience that sensation of being young again... like you. It's an old person's whim."

"Who said you could go home?!" "Heehee, if you haven't punched us enough yet, could you do it to our butts? As expected, our bodies and faces are at their limit." "Hmm, that might actually be quite nice." "If I'm to have my butt smacked by a young girl like you, I'll die happy."

The three old men turned around simultaneously and offered up their backsides. "Ugh!... Forget it." Even Chiaia seemed to have the venom drawn out of her; she turned her face away and relaxed her body.

"It's almost time to head above ground." "The shortcut is this way."

"We caused you a lot of trouble, young lady, young man. I look forward to the day we meet again." "...Good grief."

The white-haired old man guided the other two. Without hesitation, they emerged from the underground of the Holy Land to a place where a small ship was moored. Leaving the tall old man behind, the other two old men immediately boarded the ship and began preparing for departure.

It was already pitch black outside. After conveying a brief summary to the waiting Lithia and Aura, they headed toward the welcome party venue. However, perhaps because she was so exhausted, Chiaia, having stuffed herself with food, fell asleep leaning against a sofa.

"Heeheehee. Don't be so angry. Now, this is just a bit of advice from an old man..." The tall old man looked at Chiaia with a serious face. "There are things you can't do once you grow old. Besides, any memory or regret... becomes a fond memory once you reach this age."

"Eh!" "Fall in love, maiden. Well then, I'll be coming again."

With those words, the tall old man boarded the ship as if escaping. Then, the wind pressure from the ship taking off at high speed flipped up Chiaia's skirt as it sped away.

"You...! Don't you ever come back!" Holding down her skirt, Chiaia screamed toward the ship.

Kenshi walked slowly along the school path toward the independent dormitory while carrying Chiaia on his back. "Mmm... uh... huh? Wait?" Chiaia, on his back, stirred.

"A-Are you awake, Chiaia?" ".....Kenshi? Eh!? Wh-wha?" Not yet grasping the situation, Chiaia suddenly started struggling. However, her strength was strangely weak.

"We're almost there." To Kenshi's surprise, Chiaia stopped resisting almost immediately. Looking up at the sky, several stars twinkled through a gap in the clouds amidst the strong wind. At this rate, it looked like it would be clear tomorrow for the first time in a while.

".....You invited me today because you were being considerate, right?" "What are you talking about?" "Thanks." "U-um... yeah..." Her attitude of giving a straightforward thanks was so unlike Chiaia that it threw Kenshi off.

"Even you must be tired." He had been hauled around since morning, and then that incident at the end. However, it was a pleasant kind of fatigue.

"But it was fun. In various ways." "If you hadn't stopped me, I could have felt a bit more refreshed, though." "You're tired, right? I'll carry you to the dorm, so just sleep."

He was talking about those three old men. "I'm fine, put me down." "They seemed to be reflecting on it, so why not forgive them?" "They definitely haven't learned their lesson!"

"You think so?... Guegh." His neck was caught in a hold. "I can't breathe, Chiaia." "Fufu, admit it. They definitely haven't learned their lesson." "Eh?"

"Leaving me out again and looking like you're having fun..." "Kya!" Startled by the sudden voice from behind, Chiaia looked back. Lashara was watching Kenshi and Chiaia with scornful eyes. She also looked like she was sulking with her lips pouted.

"L-Lashara-sama! Since when?" "I've been behind you since the welcome party venue." "Th-this isn't what it looks like. This is, well..."

Chiaia forcibly got off Kenshi’s back. However, her legs were wobbly, and Kenshi hurriedly supported her by her side. "Hmm... You two have certainly become quite close."

"You! Just tell me already!" "Chiaia, you were so cute, though," Kawayi remarked. "Ho... now that piques my interest," Kyomi added.

Chiaia kicked Kenshi away to shake off his grip, then stood firmly on both feet.

"Ah, that’s right! I received this from Lady Lithia on the way back..." Hoping to change the awkward atmosphere, Kenshi pulled a crystal from his pocket.

"That can't be!!" Upon seeing the crystal, Lashara and Chiaia both turned pale. "H-Hand that over, Kenshi!" Chiaia cried out in a frantic voice, reaching out to snatch the crystal.

However, Kenshi nimbly spun his body away. Chiaia, losing her balance, tumbled forward onto the ground.

"Wouldn't it be interesting to see how the courage test went? Since we're all here, let's watch it together." "You fool! That is not the sort of thing to be viewed by everyone!" Lashara also reached out to try and take the crystal from Kenshi.

Lashara stared intently at the crystal. "N-No matter if it’s you, Lady Lashara, I can't show you this specifically!" "Hearing you go that far only makes me want to see it more." Lashara flashed a wicked, mean-spirited grin. "Fine, as long as we watch Lady Lashara's as well." "Wh-! What did you say?"

"Ah, that sounds good. Lady Lashara was quite cute herself." "You... are you saying you intend to make an enemy of me!?" Glared at by both Chiaia and Lashara, Kenshi fled like a literal rabbit. "That’s right, I have to show the old nannies too!" And so, this year's courage test competition came to an end.

"You fool!" "Wait! You idiot Kenshi!"

Epilogue

"Good grief..." The tall old man let out a wry chuckle as he looked back at the receding Holy Land. "Hehe, that young lady really got us," the plump old man laughed while rubbing his cheek. "It's good stimulation. It would be boring without this kind of accident every once in a while." The white-haired old man was also laughing. "As I thought, it is more interesting to be involved, even a little, than to watch from afar." "Truly, for a withered body, that was a nostalgic, sweet scent. Hee-hee-hee." "It was a delightful stimulus. That girl was so soft and..."

"We should probably stop the 'Astral stuff' now. It puts a strain on the Holy Land's facilities... and our schemes are leaking out anyway," the white-haired old man said while looking at the others.

"True. Perhaps next year we should team up with the Student Council and pull something off." "That sounds good." The three old men looked at each other and nodded.

"However, that boy is a handful. That knowledge and that physical strength... he is more of a trickster than I thought. Something about his mysterious nature is exactly like me in my younger days." "In what way!?" the white-haired old man immediately snapped at the senile, plump old man.

"Meow." At that moment, Koro, the pet kept on the ship, jumped onto the white-haired old man's lap. "Oh, have you been a good girl... Oh, that's it." The white-haired old man picked up Koro. "I wondered why I felt a sense of kinship; that boy is just like this one." "Hmm?...Haha! Indeed, he does look like him." "That's right. He spent quite a bit of time shut in there, but that boy was never boring to watch."

With a trained physique, extraordinary endurance, and a personality liked by everyone, he would likely gain considerable popularity as a Male Holy Mechanoid Master. He might even become an existence that changes the history of this world. Watching over his future would become their greatest pleasure. The tall old man was certain that days of great upheaval would undoubtedly begin soon.

"For now, I look forward to next year."

Afterword

"Why don't you try doing a novelization?" It was around April when such a request came to me while I was wandering about with nothing to do. I naively thought that if I didn't have to think of the setting or characters, it might be easy in a way... and so I accepted lightly. Of course, it wasn't that simple.

What I struggled with most was the fact that because these weren't characters I created, they wouldn't move well inside my head. How could I move them without breaking the

established character images? I couldn't just move them freely according to my own tastes.

Even so, I thought that if I added psychological descriptions that aren't visible in the anime, I could further draw out the charm of each character and make it interesting. I moved forward with the writing through much trial and error.

Chiaia, who isn't honest but shows a kind side; Lashara, who shows the dignity of a king despite her youth; Aura, who watches over the protagonist Kenshi with great tolerance—the story is packed with charming female characters. I spent my days thinking about Planet Geminar constantly, watching the DVDs dozens of times until they appeared in my dreams.

By the time I finally managed to get them "walking," the deadline was right there. I finished the manuscript with a desperate, sleepless burst of construction. I'm truly glad I made it in time. At one point, I didn't know what would happen. In the end, Mr. Kajishima, the original creator, touched it up with the intensity of rewriting the whole book, and it was completed. I am sorry for causing such trouble until the very end.

Now, for those looking at the afterword first in the bookstore, I should mention the author introduction on the cover flap. It’s a brief description of what kind of person Atsushi Wada is. By the time this is released, the anime will be on its 6th episode, and my comment was posted on the official site.

Ehhh~!! I didn't hear it was going to be used in a place like this. It makes me look like a person with no motivation. If I had known, I would have written something cooler. It's too late for regrets now. Therefore, I would like to correct my author bio to: "Handsome and an all-around athlete. A multi-talent with a secret identity as a young IT entrepreneur. In FX, he quickly saw through the subprime mortgage collapse and made vast profits. Meanwhile, he is passionate about charity work. A man of refined taste with many rumors involving popular actresses."

As a fan myself, I can't wait to see what's next. I could see up to episode 4 as reference material, but now I have to wait for the releases like everyone else. It’s painful. When I think about whether my favorite, Lady Aura, will get her big scene, I can eat my meals, but I can't get my snacks down. At this rate, I'll lose weight and my metabolic belly will disappear. *Tenchi Muyo! War on Geminar* is truly perfect for dieting.

And now, voices of praise are arriving from all over the world: "Thanks to *War on Geminar*, I got a girlfriend." [A certain novelization author, Atsushi Wa-da] "I just cried

and cried. You have to watch this anime!!" [A certain film critic, O-gi] "I almost came [while watching *War on Geminar*]." [A certain Major Leaguer, Ichi-o]

Ah, one *War on Geminar* per household. Viva *War on Geminar*. Anyway, please continue to support the anime, novelization, and comics.

July 2009, Atsushi Wada...Writing this is starting to feel empty.